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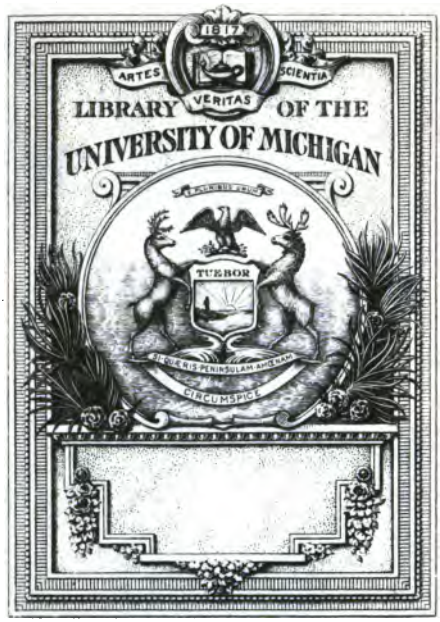

THE GIFT OF

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1834

Mannin, von Henry

HENRI QUATRE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS,
NO. 82 CLIFF-STREET,
AND SOLD BY THE PRINCIPAL BOOKSELLERS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

1834.

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Wm C. Hallands
8.22.38

HENRI QUATRE;

OR,

THE DAYS OF THE LEAGUE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Et parce que J'entens et veux mon Testament
Sortir son plein effet, tout haut, presentement,
Les Allemans, je nomme, et Cantons de Suisse
Pour les executeurs, comme aimans la justice.
LE TESTAMENT DE LA LIGUE.

The Baron and his Ritters had scarcely left the village ere the cavalry of Guise entered it from the heath; the retreating party could distinctly hear the trampling and shouting of the enemy; and as they had robbed the inhabitants with their usual freedom, they might well dread having their course pointed out by the victims of their plundering disposition. The track they were pursuing was scarcely practicable for horsemen; it was a mere path for the convenience of the woodmen, occasionally opening into areas where the wood had been felled, and where it lay piled up ready to be conveyed to the neighbouring village. The boy, who was more intelligent than could have been well expected from his habits, said that there was another road through the woods, by which the timber was removed; and which was practicable for wains and carriages, but which he had not chosen, lest they should be pursued by the enemy; and, as he very sagaciously observed, even if they found out the narrow path, there could be no fighting, as it was as much as they could do to prick their way in single file.

The difficulty of the march, however, was a great relief to the mind of De Nevailles, too much distracted with his

timely yet distressing meeting with Emilie, and its abrupt and harrowing termination. The assurance of the Cordelier, that they had nothing to fear from the Leaguers, comforted him greatly in the prospect of her safety; yet the more subtle thraldom in which he found her environed, and in which she appeared bound up a helpless prey to the stern policy of the Queen-mother, was maddening to think of; nor were his jealous affections at all relieved by the ease with which she appeared to submit to the lasting imprisonment of the convent. "And who is the monk?" was a question which he repeatedly asked of himself, but without avail. Certainly he was a friend, or pretended to be so, or Mademoiselle would never have confided to him the identity of Villa Franca and De Nevailles—a secret impervious to all but those who had seen him under both titles, for the reputation of Villa Franca was perfectly distinct from that of the Baron De Nevailles; the former was known as a political adventurer, who had crept by easy yet rapid steps into the confidence of the Queen-mother, and flourished there till he fell a secret victim to the hatred of the League; while the latter, though but young, was reckoned in France, Switzerland, and the German Protestant states, as one of the most influential nobles of the Huguenots, now that those mighty chiefs, Coligni, Condé, and several of nearly equal reputation, were no more. To have intrusted this secret, though it certainly could not be expected that it would remain long a secret, to a monk—one of a class which had avowed itself the bitterest enemy to the creed and political existence of Navarre and his people—could be only warranted by the most implicit confidence.

From these unpleasant meditations he was aroused by the trampling of horses in the rear. The Germans were then traversing the thickest part of the wood, in which they were so much impeded overhead, as well as perplexed to find secure footing for their steeds, that they were several times forced to cut away the projecting branches ere they could proceed. Turenne, who had foreseen the difficulties of the march across the hostile provinces, had provided the pioneers of the regiment with a better equipment than it could in other matters boast of,—but, unfortunately for the first troop, these were all with the main corps. Schwartz, however, who rode first, had happily stolen the landlord's best axe, which he found

lying on some timber in the hostelry yard, and which he hung, in case of need, to his saddle-bow. After their ill success with the monk, and the recovery of the lanky trooper from the severe blow he had received, which at the time took away all desire of pursuit, he and his companion went foraging about the yard, and seeing the axe, Schwartz claimed it with the pithy remark, that it would be sure to be good for something. It was more useful in their present necessity than all the oats, linen, cloth, and other raiment, with sundry articles less bulky—the spoil of his comrades. He was one of those men to whom the first view of an article capable of appropriation suggests an immediate train of its uses or uselessness.

When De Nevailles heard the sounds of pursuit, he commanded a halt, which passed from man to man throughout the narrow winding line of troopers. The urchin was next questioned on the localities of their present position; his advice, or rather command, for the Baron was forced to yield himself to his suggestions, was to wait patiently without moving or making the least noise, and he would soon hear the trampling in advance and beyond them.

"You want two more pieces for that, youngster?" cried Schwartz.

"Silence!" said De Nevailles, with a look of reprimand at the pioneer.

The heavy tread of the enemy grew nearer and nearer, till even the veteran Ezzelin, who sat next to the Baron, started with apprehension. A thick wall of foliage alone concealed them from the Leaguers; here and there, through the leaves, glanced momentarily, as the cavalry rode by, little stars of light, the reflection of their bright caparisons and accoutrements. Had the Ritters moved, they must have been seen; had a horse neighed, or impatiently struck his hoof, they would have been discovered. It was an awful moment for all, even for the boy—in whose features, however, there gleamed a beam of interest in the novelty of the situation. Ezzelin several times exchanged glances with his captain, which spoke, as much as words, the danger they ran from a force so superior.

When the sounds were at length dying away, De Nevailles inquired of the boy where the path ended. He was told in the road the enemy had just passed through;

but that there was another foot-path opposite, so that if they could cross in safety, there would be little danger of detection. They waited a short time, lest there should arrive any rear-troop of the enemy; but at length, fancying the coast quite clear, they ventured to debouch into the road, which answered to the boy's description, being of sod, with deep ruts formed by the heavy timber carriages.

Schwartz, the captain, Ezzelin with his young guide, and many of the Ritters, had already entered the opposite narrow track, when they were astounded by a fresh trampling in the direction of the village; it was followed by the cries of the Ritters, (who were still crossing,) for their comrades either to hasten on, and allow them the passage, which admitted only of single file, or to return and assist them against the enemy. If they were to suffer an attack, De Nevailles thought it was safer that it should be in the wood, where one man could defend himself against a whole squadron; he therefore ordered Schwartz to push on at any rate, and never care for a few thumps against his helmet or cuirass. The pioneer obeyed. The order for the rear to follow was conveyed, as before, from man to man; and as Schwartz was fortunately enabled to ride on at a more rapid pace, the whole troop entered ere the Leaguers arrived; but though not in time to cut off a single Ritter, the two last file were perceived, which was made known to De Nevailles by a loud shout from the enemy.

The post of honour among the Ritters, on this occasion certainly in the rear, was held by a little Hessian thief of a trooper called Fritz. It is no disparagement of his bravery, to aver that he disliked his rank in the troop exceedingly; he would rather that any other had tenanted it, even his friend, the missing lieutenant, who, it was supposed, had fallen in with a large booty, and being unable to carry it away, was lying *perdu*, determined not to part with his treasure; no one but the captain entertained any notion of his real fate, as there had been no engagement in the village. Fritz was presently made sensible of the truth of his fears; the Leaguers, most dangerous enemies, armed with arquebuses, threw in a shower of balls, which rattled on his helmet without doing him any personal injury. But one unlucky shot struck his horse, and deprived him at once of both his seat and

bag of spoil, which he was forced to leave, together with the dying animal, in the path.

The enemy cared not to charge them through such an awkward pass, but gallopped forward to join the main body, leaving an officer's guard to defend the entrance. De Nevailles felt himself in an awkward predicament; it was almost certain that he would be surrounded unless some egress were discovered beyond the range of the Catholics. The order from Turenne was to keep out of contact with the enemy, and join the regiment in its march to La Charité. According to their young guide's account they were not far from the road which Turenne had marked down in his route; and if the colonel had not already passed, it was certain he would fall in with the Leaguers, which was the Baron's only chance of safety.

Fortune seemed willing to favour him. After a difficult passage of an hour's duration, they heard the notes of war at a distance, and ardently wished themselves out of the most awkward marching they had met with since their entry into France, and at liberty to assist their comrades. But this was no easy matter. They had plundered the granary of the village, and full twenty of the strongest horses, besides man and arms, carried each a heavy sack of oats, destined for the supply of the whole regimental stud—a treat, which, owing to the rapid march and ill fare, the horses were much in want of. Every Ritter owned a sack, mostly full of booty, which he carried till something more costly presented itself, for which the humbler contents were thrown away to make room. According to express agreement, the oat-carriers having employed themselves in the public service, were entitled to a share from their comrades, and they would not throw away their forage, lest they should lose their claim on the more valuable burthens of the other troopers: so that, with these encumbrances, De Nevailles and his friends made but little progress through the thickly-planted woods.

Meanwhile, as they approached the scene of action, the firing gradually ceased; it was evident one party was beaten, but which, was as yet uncertain. When, however, they emerged from the woods—after much difficulty—they found themselves too late to take part in what had been a very clever and successful defence of Turenne against the forces of Colonel St. Paul. With the loss of a few men, the Viscount had succeeded in beating off a

superior force, and was now resting preparatory to making fresh exertions to reach the south-western provinces. The arrival of the first troop with the forage, was hailed with pleasure; though the curiosity of the Viscount was much disappointed at the mysterious disappearance of the lady and her spiritual friend, after the annihilation of her escort. De Nevailles declared, that not a house had escaped the search of the Germans; which was true. Turenne was also informed that the lieutenant was missing, though the welkin had rung with the note of recall, which he must have heard, if alive.

"Hah!" cried Turenne; then Freiberg has been too cunning for you. I doubt not he has made prisoner both lady and monk, and expects to make more of them by himself."

"He must take care," said De Nevailles, with an inward smile, "that he be not too cunning for himself."

"He gained the village before the fighting was over," said Schwartz.

"Yes, he knew what he was about," rejoined the Viscount: "but now for La Charité; let us but cross the Loire—we shall be safe."

The regiment was put as speedily as possible in marching order,—Fritz remounted on a horse which had carried a Leaguer to his death, and the urchin-guide dismissed with a full purse, to find his way home through the woods, as his local knowledge did not extend beyond their boundary. But before they began their march, Turenne addressed the men on the necessity of preserving a strict discipline. He dwelt on the danger which had menaced the first troop by engaging itself, though with his permission, in an affair not strictly bearing on the object of their toil, which was to penetrate into Guienne, or the adjoining provinces, to the relief of their suffering brethren in faith. He pointed out the utter ruin which would have befallen the regiment, had he allowed every troop to forage; —that, in the midst of their disorganization, the Catholics would have pounced upon them, and obtained an easy victory; that, with all their care, the lieutenant of the first troop was missing; nor could they, with an enemy superior in numbers hanging upon their march, attempt to make any search for this officer, who would no doubt fall a victim to the fury of the inhabitants; and that, although they had beaten St. Paul and his Leaguers, they

must be well aware, from what they experienced during their march through Burgundy, that the Leaguers' division was treble the number which had on this day attacked them, and been repulsed; that the enemy had probably pushed forward with his swiftest troops, and that the reserve corps was no doubt near at hand, and as soon as it came up, St. Paul would not fail to renew the attack. "Let us," said he, "by our rapid movement, prevent this misfortune. We are now in the province of Nivernois; the Loire is before us—that mighty river, which separates the provinces of the true faith from those still sunk in superstition."

After a careful peroration in this plain style, addressed to the understanding of his men, he proceeded in a warmer strain, pointing out the glory which had accrued to the Ritters of former campaigns, who had made the passage of the Loire in spite of the forest of spears which lined the opposite bank. He concluded by a flourishing appeal to their love of glory and of their Christian faith; and when he perceived that the enthusiasm was at its height, he pointed with his sword in the direction of their march.

"There!" cried he, "ride the haughty Catholics of the Queen-mother; let us pluck the plumes from their proud crests!"

A thousand voices echoed back his appeal.

"March!" The trumpet reiterated the order, and the Ritters rushed to their banquet of war.

As the Viscount had predicted, so it fell out. Towards evening, a large division of the Leaguers was perceived from the brow of a hill, sprinkling a distant plain, which the Germans had marched over some hours previously. They could not be mistaken. The setting sun threw its slant beams upon the far east, interspersing the gloomy landscape with the deep red glow of spearhead, helmet, and curving cuirass. This was a scene not lost upon the Viscount. He ordered two hours' rest; the horses fared sumptuously on the remainder of the hard food, which had cost the first troop so much trouble to bring with them through the wood. To cattle accustomed repeatedly to put up with the weak, scanty, and idle fare of herbage, a double meal of corn was a luxury which must be worked out in labour, and in good heart. So it was intended. They marched the greater part of the night; and if St. Paul had conceived any design of imitating the Protector

by midnight attacks upon the Ritters, he was grievously out of his reckoning.

Half the next day passed over their heads, and it gladdened the heart of Turenne to find they were nearing the post of struggle. There only remained to traverse a plain, though of great extent, and a forest of equal width, upon emerging from which, they would be in sight of the strong town of La Charité, overlooking from the side of a hill that stream which has been appropriately called the Euphrates of France; and indeed, a glance at the map will display its magnitude, showing how it encloses a fourth of the kingdom, as it were within two outstretched arms, from its northernmost curve at Orleans; the right arm bending westward towards the sea beyond Nantes, the left making a grasp to the southward, passing by La Charité.

But the bold regiment which had now entered on the plain, was doomed to incur fresh difficulties. The rear scouts reported to the Viscount that the Catholics were not far off; and before the Ritters had reached the middle of the open track, the advance guard of St. Paul was seen in the rear. Turenne was resolved not to fight on the plain, where he might be easily outflanked and encompassed; he resolved to seek the shelter of the forest, where the localities might present a favourable posture of defence.

As the main body of the Catholics were yet at some distance, he accomplished this object without difficulty. Avoiding Charybdis to fall upon Scylla, has been the fortune of men in all ages; though with Turenne and his Germans the alternative was worse, and might be rather expressed by the culinary metaphor of out of the frying-pan into the fire; a homely saying, but the bathos, in the application of proverbs, has ever been allowable.

Scarcely had the regiment entered the road leading through the forest, when Ezzelin returned with the alarming news that there was a strong corps of chivalry advancing from the side of La Charité. Turenne exchanged a quick glance with De Nevailles.

"They cannot be Leaguers," said the former; "but troops from Paris!"

Ezzelin had not approached near enough to observe their ensigns, but he described them as chiefly composed

of gentlemen, being fully armed, and presenting a glittering array of steel from head to foot.

"Perhaps Valois himself has taken the field!" said Turenne; but at any rate, they have certainly heard of our approach, or of our good friend St. Paul. Catherine has been too wise to leave the banks of the Loire unprotected from either Ritter or Leaguer."

"Well!" said De Nevailles, laughing, "let us leave St. Paul to fight with them; he is much stronger than we; if we drop into the forest, what is to prevent our two enemies drubbing each other?"

"Any thing but ill-will if they meet," rejoined the colonel; "now Oak and Poplar,"—these were the epithets he often applied to the two advanced scouts, Ezzelin and Schwartz, "the pioneers are under your guidance."

The regiment was quickly lost in the forest glades, leaving the road free for any gentle or rough passage-at-arms which might occur in its absence. After a march of several miles, they heard the report of fire-arms.

"St. Paul's matchlocks are at work," cried Turenne, laughing; "but we are not yet secure."

The distant contest was a subject of laughter for the whole regiment. Every stroke of the sword—every thrust of the lance, was a blow in their favour on whichever side it fell. But the colonel was still in a dilemma; the river must be crossed, and the country was in arms! Without attempting to quit the woodland shelter, the regiment bent its course, in a sloping direction, to the verge of the forest on the side of La Charité, that it might take advantage even of the most desperate opportunity of accomplishing their object.

On arriving at a secure place of encampment, where the nature of the ground would have required six times their number to dislodge them, the Ritters halted, and the colonel proceeded to take counsel with his officers. It was resolved that De Nevailles, who was acquainted with the country generally, accompanied by Ezzelin, should put aside their equipments, and make a reconnoissance on foot, to gather information respecting the state of defence on the banks of the river. The Baron, who had never adopted the Ritter uniform, was prepared to pass unsuspected any where, his face being unknown; and Ezzelin, out of

the plunder, was soon provided with a less ambiguous costume.

An occasional report of fire-arms ever and anon broke on the ear, as the Baron with his sturdy esquire left the bivouac to reconnoitre. The space between the town and the belt of forest land, they found interspered with huts, and habitations of a character scarcely superior. On passing the door of one of the latter description, a woman rushed out in a state of alarm, and earnestly requested their assistance to save the life of her husband from the anger of a madman.

Upon entering the house, they found him extended on the floor, beneath a rough-looking peasant, whose knee was on his victim's breast.

"Swear that you disown him," cried the madman, clutching the other's throat, "or by the Holy Well of St. Denis you shall hear your next mass in purgatory."

"A logical mode of convincing a man!" said De Nevailles, catching hold of the peasant, and hurling him off his victim, whom the Baron proceeded to lift up. While performing this act, the madman, uttering a cry of revenge, rushed to a bundle of wood, and seizing a large fagot-stake, was on the point of aiming a blow at the Baron, when the old trooper very calmly grasping that end of the weapon raised over the shoulder, and placing his foot with a smart push behind the peasant's knee, at once brought him into the humble posture of genuflexion.

"Bind him, or he'll murder you!" cried the woman, running to find a piece of cord, with which she immediately returned. During her absence it required the strength of both the trooper and De Nevailles to hold the wretch in his kneeling posture; with the assistance, however, of the husband, his arms were securely bound.

"Bring the fagots here! Fanchette!" cried the rescued man to his wife. The bundle was dragged close to the peasant's feet; and he himself presently seated on it despite his struggles. "Now for the legs!" said the man.

"Pierre! Pierre! Enough!" cried the peasant, imploringly:—"I'll sit as quiet as a monk."

"You are one already, Bonhomme," said De Nevailles, —"a sincere Cordelier."

"Is the king a good Catholic, then?" exclaimed Pierre, taking pity on his prisoner.

Both De Nevailles and the trooper burst out into loud

laughter at this singular question. The peasant appeared to the Baron to be of lofty stature, with a gaunt sinewy frame; he had already given a specimen of strength beyond what usually accompanies the age of which his face gave token. A low forehead, arched and thick eyebrows projecting over small, sunken, and glowing eyes; a hawk-like nose, and small but pointed chin, made his face resemble, though imperfectly, that of the king of birds. His skin was excessively sunburnt, of a colour between red and brown, and seamed in close and regular wrinkles over the whole of the face, with the exception of its most prominent feature, where it was stretched like parchment on a military tambour; but about the mouth especially, the wrinkles were so regular as to appear natural, and lent an expression of cunning to the mouth, which looked for ever grinning with a malicious sardonic smile. To the question of Pierre, he replied hesitatingly—

"No—Yes; or St. Denis would never have suffered me to be tied up."

"Bravo! a noble convert!" said Pierre, proceeding to unbind the prisoner.

De Nevailles turned to the woman for an explanation of this strange behaviour on the part of both the madman and her husband; he was not at all pleased with the prospect of having the captive once more free; for there he sat grinning most suspiciously, while Pierre was unloosing the cord, which caused the Baron to remove to some distance, that he might not be taken by surprise.

"There is no danger, Monsieur," said Fanchette, following him, "when Louis has given us his word!"

Upon De Nevailles inquiring into his history, she informed him that he was a wood-cutter, and lived in the forest of Chambord near Blois, and supplied many of the inhabitants of that town with fuel. He was very strong and fearless, and fond of attacking his neighbours, the wolves and bears, and had been so successful in the pastime, that the walls of his hut were piled to the roof with their skulls. All his furniture and clothes were the fruits of these contests; his bed and covering were made of bear-skins, the bed being elevated above the floor by close layers of wolves' skulls. "And look at his dress, Monsieur," continued the woman;—"there's nothing except that strap and buckle round his body but what he obtained from his prey!"

"But why so violent?" asked the Baron.

"Oh! but Louis Le Lupin is very devout and confesses regularly," replied the woman;—"he is half mad, poor fellow! When a boy he lived with his father in a wooden hut close to a brook, which, they say, now runs through the grand gardens; they were turned out to make room for King Francis to build his great palace there. The old man died soon afterward, and Louis believing that being driven from the hut broke his father's heart, has been ever since very violent whenever any of our kings or their relatives are spoken of. He is very dutiful and obedient to the monks all round about Blois; he will sometimes bring wood in the night, and lay it at the door of the convent of his confessor, who is, as Louis tells me, a Father Capuchin, and dwells at the house close to the royal gardens in Blois. It 's a long distance, Monsieur, from this hut to the convent, as Pierre says; I have never been there; but Louis has a boat of his own, and crosses at all hours. He got it at first, when king Charles ordered a toll on all market goods crossing the bridge; the collector said Louis's fagots were to pay toll—Look, he is now talking peaceably enough with Pierre; there's no harm in him, if one don't talk about our kings. Well, Monsieur, Louis would not pay the toll, and they tried to take his wood, but he caught hold of the collector, and flung him into the river; he was not drowned, yet it would have gone hard with Louis, if his friends, the monks, had not interceded for his pardon; they afterward gave him a boat for his own use. Louis says he would have paid the toll, if it had been for any one but the king."

"But how came your husband," said De Nevailles, amused with the narration, "to talk with him on the wrong subject, when he knows his infirmity?"

"One can't help it at times, Monsieur!" replied the woman, "for he brings on the talk himself, and says of our gracious kings what we do not like to hear—all to provoke us. The monks have encouraged it, since they quarrelled with his majesty; before that, they used to chide him for his violence. He is made to go on errands for them, and knowing well the neighbouring provinces, is a very useful messenger. He has been at La Charité the last two days —it 's a long way from Blois—but he comes with a message to the convent, and would go any where for the monks.

He is here very often—every one knows him—but he will not sleep in the town because the Duke is there—"

"What Duke?" said the Baron.

"The Duke De Joyeuse, Monsieur, the king's great favourite," replied Fanchette, to whom the interruption of her patient listener had given breathing time: "he is at La Charité with a host of gentlemen—he is a noble looking—"

"I am a stranger from the south, my good Fanchette," said De Nevailles, whose mind was now crowded with busy images:—"I should like to know why the Duke and his friends are here, at this little place, instead of the court."

"It is not a very little place, Monsieur,—it is a beautiful town," replied the woman, speaking in praise of the place of her nativity; "but you must know, Monsieur, that the heretics and the King of Navarre have an army in Guienne; and our good Queen has sent a large army against them—it marched more than a week ago from Orleans or Saumur; Pierre's friend, the carpenter at La Charité, could not tell which place—and the Duke De Joyeuse is to command it."

"Then why did not he march with his soldiers?" said De Nevailles.

"Ah! Monsieur! you would have done the same as he has done," said Fanchette, laughing; "he was only married a fortnight, when the Queen ordered him to take the command of the army, but he told Monsieur Lavardine to march on with the troops, and he would follow with his gentlemen. When he arrived at Orleans he heard that the soldiers of the traitor Guise——"

The woman was here interrupted by a deep growl from Louis, which made Ezzelin grin. She continued:—

"When the Duke heard that the soldiers of Guise, whom Pierre calls Leaguers, because they are leagued against the King, were marching towards the banks of the Loire, and that a host of German heretics were with them——"

"You are wrong, Fanchette," said Pierre, "I was told this morning by one of the Duke's own armourers, that the Leaguers were driving the heretics before them like a flock of sheep, strait towards this province, and that the Duke, hearing of it at Orleans, was afraid of crossing the river at that city, lest the troops which are scattered along the banks, should not be strong enough to repel both heretic and leaguer; so he came out of his way to La Charité, to look after the defences of the river."

"Mind your own business, Pierre," said the woman; then turning to the patient listener, she said:—"Louis has been taught by the priests to pray for the Duke of Guise—he would like to see him King of France—but every one at La Charité loves the King because he took off the taxes for three years when we were distressed. He is a very good creature—and so is this Duke De Joyeuse. Poor gentleman! suppose he were killed in the battle which he is going to fight with the King of Navarre and the Gascons—and only married three weeks! It would kill Madame too!

Though Ezzelin was a much better French scholar than his comrade Schwartz, yet he could with difficulty interpret the rapid utterance of Fanchette; he learned enough, however, to exchange significant glances with his captain on the nature of the intelligence which was pouring in upon them so rapidly. But De Nevailles had already planned something beyond conveying mere gossip to the Ritters' camp in the forest; and proceeded to put his scheme in execution.

He had remarked the anger of the peasant whenever the name of the King was introduced; and hearing from Fanchette that his first cause of hatred against the dynasty of Valois had been aggravated by the lessons of the monks, whose creature he appeared to be, so far as his half-wit and strong limbs could serve them, he resolved to work upon this feeling, and make it subservient to his own purposes.

"I am going to La Charité myself," said the Baron; and should be glad if Louis would accompany us to show the way. I dare trust myself in his company!"

Pierre and his wife were glad for the present to get rid of their violent guest, and easily prevailed upon him to attend the gentleman and his servant.

"But I will not sleep in La Charité with the troops of that wicked King!" cried Louis.

"You need go no farther than the gates," said the Baron.

This matter being settled, Louis led the way out, first casting a look of ineffable contempt upon Pierre and his good woman, who whispered to De Nevailles, not to say any thing about royalty, or the mad fit would return again.

CHAPTER XIX.

Fortune est de chacun la maitresse puissante,
Louable toutefoir: car apres qu'elle a fait
Par sa legerete aux hommes un malfait,
Un bien suit son malheuir, tant elle est inconstante.

RONSARD.

WHEN out of hearing of Pierre and his wife, De Nevailles said to the peasant:—"Louis, should you like to see the Duke of Guise king of France?"

Louis turned round, with a cunning look, and nodded his head.

"Was the Duke De Joyeuse to attack the Leaguers to-day, as I heard that he rode out with his friends armed for the field?" inquired the Baron.

Louis, who was striding on in advance, turned his head round a second time and nodded.

"Ask him if he knows the depth of the stream," whispered Ezzelin.

"Be silent," replied the Baron in the same tone, "and see how I'll manage him; I have often practised on cleverer subjects than this cracked peasant." Then raising his voice, he said, "Louis, can you keep a secret?"

The peasant showed his teeth.

"I am a friend of the Duke of Guise," said the Baron.

Louis Le Lupin stopped and looked suspiciously at his convoy.

"Come closer, Louis," cried De Nevailles, "you shall so serve the Duke of Guise, that when King, he will grant whatever you want. What would you ask him for?"

"If you were the friend of the good Duke," said the peasant, "why did you let Pierre and his wife speak so foul of him?"

"We are both his soldiers," replied De Nevailles, "and I was afraid they would betray us to that proud De Joyeuse. Now answer my question, and I will tell you more. What should you desire of the princely Lorraine, if I brought you to his footstool when he was seated on the throne, and told him that you had saved the lives of a thousand of his friends?"

Louis paused; a tear came to his eye, as he said, "I

would ask him to fill this cap with bright crowns, that I might have masses said for my father in every church in Blois.

This pious request made the Baron almost ashamed of his meditated imposition; it required him to remember that the safety of the regiment depended on the manœuvre, ere he could proceed. A stroke of kindness, or even an unconscious appeal to their sensibility, will do more with most men than the most violent opposition to their views; the latter only stimulates them to the conflict, while the former disarms them of all but magnanimity of feeling. But a glance at the rough trooper by his side, warned De Nevailles that refinement of feeling was a superfluous gift to a captain of the German Ritters.

"Well, Louis," said he, "you and I feel pretty sure that the Duke will come to the throne; and when he does, you shall have the gold. What do our friends the Capuchins of Blois say of him?"

"I can only pray for him," said Louis smiling;—"but they do more—but I must not tell."

"Now Louis," said the Baron, looking earnestly at the peasant, as he proceeded with apparently a desperate, yet well-conceived resolution—to put the fortunes of the regiment in his power—"you shall hear my secret—which I could only intrust to a friend of the Duke of Guise."

Hereupon he related to the wonder-struck Louis, that one of Guise's regiments had concealed itself from De Joyeuse in the forest; that he was one of its officers, and had ventured from his retreat to search for some kind friend who would guide them out of danger.—He was interrupted by Louis, who with kindling eyes, inquired if the Protector were with them; and upon the Baron replying in the negative, the peasant, who would have given every thing he was worth to see the Duke, again inquired whether he was in the province.

"No," replied De Nevailles, "he will not come to the Loire, till he has driven away the King from Paris; but he sent us to cross the river, telling us to ask assistance of all sincere Catholics in the name of the holy League."

"By St. Denis!" exclaimed the peasant, almost in rapture, "I will run to tell the holy fathers of St. Benedict."

"You shall do no such thing, Louis," said the Baron, exchanging a smile with the trooper, "the holy fathers would take all the glory of the enterprise to themselves.

It was destined for you alone. It was a happy day for you when you left Blois to come to La Charité."

"So the Capuchins said when they sent me," replied Le Lupin," do you think they knew I should meet with such great friends?"

"I think not," rejoined De Nevailles, "and you had better not tell any of them—they are your friends now—but if they become aware of what you have done, they will feel envious of you. Keep it a secret till you meet the Duke of Guise, and then your glory will blaze out all at once."

If the readers could have seen the face of Ezzelin during this colloquy, their gravity, unlike his, would have been unable to maintain the least struggle with the ludicrous effect produced by his features in his attempt to repress the laughter which was choking him. Till this interview he had looked upon the captain as a proud, reserved young noble, unfit to associate with free troopers; but the style in which he hooked the peasant, and the steady hand with which he played him, proved to the German, that he was well fitted for his adventurous post.

Having received a promise from Le Lupin that he would keep secret the adventure till means could be found to introduce him to the presence of his great friend, De Nevailles next inquired respecting the passage of the Loire. He was overjoyed to learn that the peasant was acquainted with a ford above the town, where they might, by using proper precautions, pass in safety. The chief difficulty was to pass unseen through the open country, between the forest and the river, as every tenable station on the banks was garrisoned; and above all, La Charité boasted the presence of the Duke of Joyeuse, unless, indeed, he and his friends had been routed by the Protector's troops, which was very improbable. But in order to ascertain this point, the Baron despatched Le Lupin to gain intelligence respecting the result of the contest, and the disposition of the patrolling troops who lined the opposite banks. Having said every thing to Louis that was necessary, and pointed out the exact spot where he would find Ezzelin on his return after dark, the Baron dismissed him to La Charité, and sought his way back to the camp, leaving the trooper at the place of rendezvous, lest there should be any mistake which might prove fatal.

The result of his reconnoissance was communicated to Turenne alone, who, thankful for their deliverance from De Joyeuse, ordered all things to be made ready for the night-march. The Ritters threw away, as mariners do in a leaky vessel, every thing that was not conveniently portable as well as valuable; several light carriages, which formed the train of the regiment, and which held the ammunition and other necessaries, were dispossessed of the heavy bales of cloth and linen, with which the troopers had laden them; the sylvan glade was turned into a bazaar full enough of the *utile et dulce*, to have gladdened the hearts and stocked the boxes of an army of pedlers;—maddening must have been the pleasure, and if an Israelite, fervent the blessings heaped on the prophets, by the itinerant dealer whom chance might lead that way. Whether the goodly raiment and other finery perished by the destroying influence of the elements, or whether fortune made some favourite child rich in a lucky hour, we know not; one might search the municipal records and traditions of La Charité, till one were weary, without alighting on a single trace of what befell the abandoned spoil. All that can be averred is, that the forests of Nivernois never gave back to the plains of Burgundy and Lorraine their own.

Night had fully set in ere the sentinel at the camp was disturbed from his silent post by the approach of footsteps. It was Ezzelin and the ever-grinning peasant. They were conducted to the Viscount, who was sitting beneath an oak; all around looked gloomy; the military carriages and the Ritters, who were already in their saddles, were scarce distinguishable in the deep shade of the trees; here and there might be perceived the outline of a horseman, but not more distinct than the masses of foliage which the benighted peasant often mistakes for living forms or evil sprites. It was a dark night, suited for a bold purpose.

"Well, Louis!" said De Nevailles, leading the peasant close up to the colonel, "here is our noble commander, who has been waiting for you. He is the right hand of the Duke of Guise!"

The Viscount, who had been tutored by De Nevailles, arose, and embraced the peasant with kindness.

"You were sent here to be our salvation," said he—"our children will thank you."

The poor deluded Louis, whose mind on every subject connected with Valois and Guise was tinged with delusion, if not insanity, was happier in his new honours than he had been since childhood. To be embraced by a bosom friend of the Protector of the League, was next to being embraced by the Protector himself. Many a cunning thought on the revenge he was heaping upon Valois passed through his mind.

To the inquiries of the Viscount with regard to De Joyeuse, the peasant shook his head, and said, while staring around at the sylvan encampment—"The haughty Duke, with his gold armour, has pursued your friends across the plain. And he sent word back to the governor of the town, that he will not return till he has driven the Leaguers out of the province. He little thinks you are left behind; but you must take care, Monseigneur, for the governor has orders to withdraw the garrisons from the other towns, and assemble them in one army. Till this is done, the Duke says, he shall not cross the Loire to fight the Huguenots."

"Then *we* will cross this very night, Louis, with your assistance," said Turenne.

The peasant, to whom the scene was a novelty, began casting an inquisitive eye around; it fell upon the bales of merchandise scattered about; two or three of the Ritters were in the midst of it disputing.

"May I never see the Rhine again," exclaimed little Fritz, one of the group, in his native tongue, "if I leave this fine linen behind for the wolves to tear to pieces."

"You are a little lubberly fool, and a big thief," said Ezzelin, dragging him off; your own stuff was lost in the wood, and you have no right to this. Come, no trifling! We shall have plenty again when we meet the Catholics."

So saying, Ezzelin, with the assistance of another trooper, carried off by force the unwilling Hessian, who would have risked the safety of the expedition, for the sake of pleasing his dear frau Margaretha, for whom he had destined the merchandise; but the attempt was useless, and he was pitched on his horse by his comrades, as a porter pitches his load.

"Bravo!" cried Louis, who mistook Fritz for a prisoner, and ran forward to assist, "when we reach the stream, we'll gurgle him between wind and water, by the holy St. Denis!"

"Holy devil!" shouted Schwartz, who had not seen the guide enter the camp, "who are you? An idolatrous Catholic by your mouth-piece! How is your master Guise?"

And before Ezzelin could explain that the peasant was their future guide, Schwartz, who took him for a neighbouring hind, who had somehow intruded into the camp by favour of the darkness of the night, caught hold of the supposed interloper: but Louis, who was excessively angered by the profanity of the Ritter, embraced him tightly round the waist, the best mode of dealing with such a lathy fellow, and pitched him fairly into the chaotic mass of merchandise, over which he rolled, alternately coming in contact with the hard and soft substances.

The affair had begun, and was finished so suddenly, that neither Turenne nor the Baron was able to prevent the conflict; but they took care to prevent any unpleasant consequences.

"How strangely that prisoner talked," said Louis, addressing De Nevailles; then looking attentively at the abandoned spoil, "Ah! I see," said he, "you have caught a rich stranger-merchant, and these are his goods, poor fellow! How will you carry all these?"

"We leave them here," replied De Nevailles: "he is a heretic, and we dare not touch them. But it is time for us to march, and you must lead the way."

"I never heard a Frenchman speak like that man who caught hold of my belt," exclaimed Le Lupin, "what province is he of?"

"He is a borderer," replied De Nevailles, smiling, "near the German states, where they speak a language of their own."

As the regiment was already in marching order, the Baron and his half-witted guide had to pass the entire line of troops to gain their post in the van: Louis stopped at almost every file to look at his brave friends, as he called them. Although it was dark, the appearance of the men struck him as somewhat strange; he remarked the disparity of their arms and clothing.

"The soldiers of the Duke De Joyeuse's own regiment are all alike," said Louis; but why has this man no helmet?" continued he, laying his hand on the neck of the trooper's steed.

"His thick skull needs none," was on the tip of the

Baron's tongue; but he had learned prudence during his stay at the Louvre, and was now much more circumspect; he was, however, saved a reply by the German, who uttered something not over courteous in his own dialect.

The peasant started:—"another borderer—but he must be still nearer to Germany, for I could not understand a word he said—what was it?"

"A prayer used by his countrymen in cases of difficulty," said De Nevailles, taking him by the arm, and leading him on at a quicker rate, for he was afraid that the natural sagacity of the peasant would penetrate the deception.

"Now, Louis!" cried the impatient Viscount, "lead us to the ford by the most secret route."

The peasant obeyed. De Nevailles and the two scouts followed next with the first troop; while the main corps was headed by Turenne. Louis never once appeared at a loss, but continued at a steady pace till they emerged into the open country; unfortunately the night which had favoured them, when favour was not so requisite, now showed signs of becoming much lighter than they cared for; the clouds which had hitherto hung like a heavy drapery beneath the heavens, and threatened rain with their blackness, now parted company, and displayed long seams of light.

"Louis," cried the apprehensive De Nevailles, "where are those lights?"

"A very proper question," exclaimed Schwartz;—"I do not at all like this rough papal idolatrous guide."

"Very likely," said Ezzelin drily, "but the captain and I know him better than you do. He's a cracked bell, but made of good metal. Only think of that little, cowardly vagabond Fritz, who cried because he was obliged to leave the woman's gear in the forest. I would rather be mad Louis than him."

The guide, who had taken time to consider the question and collect his memory, replied to De Nevailles, that the nearest lights were at Munot, where there were no soldiers; and those in the same line, but farther south, at Pougues, where were to be found plenty of arquebusiers; it was strongly garrisoned for the defence of the river, though it lay inland some distance—"but no harm can come to us," continued Louis, "ours is a holy march. I

have vowed to *Notre Dame des Aides*, at Blois, a pile of fagots as high as my hut."

"Here's a rank idolater and slave of Rome to trust our lives to!" said Schwartz:—"Notre Dame, indeed,—a pile of fagots! that is just the quantity I would bestow on her; only I would put the jade in the midst of it. By blessed Luther, when we have got power here, I shall burn every picture and image I can find. The meanest of these peasant wretches talks about his Notre Dame—some bit of painted wood in the church—as though she were the high and well-born lady of the barony."

"If you do not hold your tongue, Schwartz," cried De Nevailles, "you shall go to the rear."

"That's the borderer I threw over the merchant's goods," muttered Louis to himself; but as he could not stop without risk of being knocked down by the horses, he cried out, "what was that you said about the image of Notre Dame? you have never been at Blois I am sure—or they would have slit your tongue to make you talk more like a Christian."

"A Christian?" cried Schwartz in a fury, *Der Teufel!* you"—— but what he said more was only a splutter, for Ezzelin clapped his hand over his comrade's mouth.

"Worse and worse," cried Le Lupin, bursting into a roar of laughter in which many joined.

"May Heaven permit us to cross the river," said the Baron to himself, "and I will take care to dismiss this wood-cutter before daylight." Then raising his voice, for he saw they were approaching what his guide had called Munot; "And which way are you now going?—through Munot?"

"No," replied Le Lupin, "but close by—and then between Pougues and the river, till we come to the place where I forded the shallows with the cattle of the holy fathers of St. Benedict."

"I hope so," said Schwartz to Ezzelin, "but by the holy fathers of St. Benedict, I do not like him."

The march was, indeed, one of great danger, from the chance of their being discovered by the peasantry, whose huts they passed; fortunately it was beyond the hour of retiring to rest, and they were happily fast asleep. The lights at Munot were, however, still burning; and as they approached it, the feelings of the Ritters became fully awakened to their critical situation. But Louis was mad

only on one point; in other matters he was cunning enough, and knew what he was about;—to the great joy of the regiment, he led it close to Munot, yet without disturbing even a watch-dog; and then crossing the great road which runs from town to town along the whole course of the mighty stream, he bent his steps towards the river. On a sudden he stopped. De Nevailles and the first file anticipating an ambush, reined in; and the front ranks being thus checked without word of command, the whole regiment was thrown into disorder, jostling against each other, with a crash and clatter which would have drowned the voices of half a dozen men.

A deep oath escaped the lips of the Baron at this untoward event; and Turenne riding up, cried, "How is this? they must have heard us a league hence."

"Louis can alone tell," replied De Nevailles.

"We are sold to the holy fathers of St. Benedict," said Schwartz.

"I am sure I heard the sentinels at Pougues—and I stopped to listen," said Louis.

"Umph! and I am sure they must have heard our foolish challenge," rejoined Turenne—he hastily inquired the distance to the ford. The peasant made a rude guess.

"Forward, then!" shouted the Viscount, "we'll fight for it while our wains are crossing the stream."

The passing regiment was hidden from the view of the sentinels at Pougues by the plantation which intervened, an obstruction which would not have been allowed, had this little town been of longer military importance. There was no track to follow but the steps of Louis, who, guided by the moon, which now shone between the scattered clouds, pushed on at a quick pace, and soon brought the Germans to the brow of a descent, where at the bottom was seen the river reflecting the silver light in ceaseless play.

"*Dieu merci!*" exclaimed Turenne, "now, Louis, be both cautious and bold—our lives are in your power."

A troop was left to guard the descending pass to the ford, while the peasant conducted the regiment to the margin of the stream, which was rapid enough—and to appearance sufficiently deep—to inspire fear into the boldest trooper.

As the space between the stream and the ascent was sufficiently wide, the troopers, as they reached the level

ground, wheeled to the left, and dropped into a line parallel with the banks. The carriages remained at the foot of the pass.

"There is sure footing," said Louis, "if you follow exactly my footsteps; I have even crossed after heavy rains."

But it is doubtful whether the wood-cutter had ever passed over the ford at night; he paused and looked about as if in doubt where to put his first foot.

"Here, by St. Denis!" he exclaimed at length; and a splash was heard in the water.

They watched his progress till he was near one half across; the water did not rise above his knees; and Turenne, taking confidence, ordered Ezzelin to lead over a guard from the first troop to take possession of the opposite banks. The old trooper with his comrades followed the track of the peasant, who remained stationary as a beacon till Ezzelin was within reach.

"Are you a borderer?" cried Louis.

"What do you mean?" shouted Ezzelin.

"Ah, it's all right," rejoined the guide, "you are not a borderer."

"I thought it would come to this," said Schwartz.

"There are two deep holes somewhere about here," said Louis doubtingly, "where the trout lie in cold weather. Stand till you see me safe in the middle of the stream; and let each man in his turn stay exactly where that borderer sits till his comrade in advance reaches the middle—if I had a spear, I would stick it in there for a sign-post."

"That's just what a 'poplar' is fit for," cried Ezzelin.

Louis, who had only a moderately long staff, groped his way with care, till on a sudden they beheld him slide under, as a stage-demon sinks through a trap-door. The Ritters were breathless with anxiety; none durst move towards the pit; but the peasant rose like a water-god, and, after a scrambling fashion, regained his feet.

"That's where I lost the abbot's cow!" cried Louis, after drawing a long breath.

"Here's a place for a Christian soldier to ford," shouted Schwartz; "the evil ways of Popery will be our destruction! It's of no use laughing, Ezzelin."

"I cannot help it," replied his comrade: "look! he is kicking a poor trout to death."

"Here is a large stone," said Louis, "which one can always see in daylight—keep on the left—but not a great way, for there is danger on the other side."

"Louis is right," said Ezzelin; "two or three lances would make us as safe as on dry land. Halt, Louis, till I return."

Away dashed Ezzelin over the firm ground he had just trodden, splashing the spray around him in showers. To the eye of De Nevailles, there appeared something strikingly picturesque in the black horse and its rough rider, reflecting a gleaming light from his helmet and cuirass, and moving through a foam of silver. It excited a glow of enthusiasm which he could scarcely account for in the trivial incident which had given it birth.

Ezzelin explained the difficulties of the passage, but not a lance was to be had in the regiment. After a moment's thought Turenne suggested that the pennon-staves should be used for this purpose.

"The very thing!" cried De Nevailles.

The pennons were handed to the trooper, with orders to hasten the passage, as Turenne was chafing himself with the expectation of an interruption from the garrison of Pougues. The first staff was planted at the extremity of the line of safety; or, as Louis had expressed it, where the borderer Schwartz, sat; the other was hurled towards the peasant, who, catching hold of it, carefully retraced and fathomed the pass; planting it as a beacon to warn them of the hole. This performed, Louis strode on, and reached the other side without farther danger. His example was followed by Schwartz and the guard with equal success, leaving Ezzelin to act as a guide to the wains, which Turenne, seeing the passage had been accomplished, ordered to follow next. The Loire, like most rocky streams, was alternately deep and shallow; none but those well acquainted with the stream, could hope to pass in safety; least of all, at night, when, without the slightest warning or indication of danger, a whole troop might be swallowed up at once.

The greatest care had been taken by the Germans to place the powder in the wains as high as possible, that there might be every chance of its escaping damage. The rear wain was passing the second pennon, followed by the last detachment of the first troop, when a signal was made from the hill, which indicated the approach of

an enemy. Ezzelin, who was at his post, close by the first pennon, shouted out to the leader of the wain to hasten on, which the trooper did with so much precipitation, that the horses swerved to the right, and plunged into deep water. The equipage disappeared in the midst of a tremendous splash, followed by the cries of the men who witnessed the engulfment. The driver fortunately was the only one drowned. An agitation of the water and a bubbling of air to the surface, which Ezzelin said was the trooper's last breath, told his fate to the regiment.

"Forward, Herren!" cried the scout; "we cannot save him—he's locked in with the harness. And you, Fritz! move on—or you'll embrace the abbot's cow yourself."

By this time the main body of the regiment, with the exception of the last troop, retreating down the pass from the approaching enemy, were fording the stream; and, by the assistance of the pennons and the old trooper, who encouraged the men, and pointed out the track of safety, the river was forded without any other loss to the adventurous Germans. Turenne and De Nevailles, with several officers, awaited to pass with the descending troop.

"We are pursued!" cried Turenne; "I can see the enemy's files—they were not far off when the signal was made—we shall have a smart charge in our rear. I hope it will not sink us!"

"The fate of that wain is not to be envied," said De Nevailles; "I trust none of our troop are lost."

When the retreating Ritters had gained the level ground, the colonel, without staying to inquire concerning their pursuers, dashed into the stream, making direct for the solitary Ezzelin, and followed by the whole troop. A shower of bullets flew after them, but fortunately whistled over their heads without injury.

"Ezzelin is a better mark than we, from their elevation," cried Turenne, as he heard the splash of the balls near the old trooper, whose black steed stood like a rock in the midst of the gushing waters.

"Single file, colonel!" cried the veteran, as the troop neared the first pennon.

"Ezzelin, you are lieutenant of the first troop," cried the colonel, as he obeyed the Ritter's warning. The

rocks echoed back the shouts which followed this announcement.

De Nevailles, the last of the troop, plucked out the second pennon; while Ezzelin, unmindful of the balls which fell about him, remained till the Ritters were close upon the shore, and then seizing the other standard, waved it in defiance of the Catholic forces, which now lined the margin of the river.

"The Baron De Nevailles has given me a chance of finding the cow which Louis lost," muttered the trooper, as, in the absence of the pennon, he carefully searched with its fellow for the rock which had guided the peasant, and which rendered him the same good service.

"Now soldiers!" cried the Viscount to his men drawn up in order of march, after the most difficult adventure they had as yet met with, "De Joyeuse himself will never forgive us! We have no time to waste with those bad marksmen yonder! Our valour is now discretion—our courage speed! The light of day must break upon us far distant from this rocky stream. But let us thank Heaven for its protection!"

"Louis," continued Turenne, "we must avoid both Bourges and Chateauroux. Lead us to the most unfrequented road in the direction of Poitiers, where we must part—you to Blois, and ourselves to attack the army of the King in the south!"

As the country on both banks of the Loire was in possession of the Catholics, the colonel judged it most prudent to continue his course in a westerly direction, as he did not doubt that, when daylight broke, the enemy would cross the ford at Pougues, or by the easier passage at La Charité, where a bridge connected the town with an island in the river, and from it to the opposite shore.

Le Lupin, who was wet through, started at a rapid pace. He now looked upon himself as a great man; nor were the Ritters inclined to undervalue his services. Even Schwartz melted into kindness. And though the language of the scout was scarcely intelligible to the peasant, yet he understood its tone, and returned the compliment with a smile and a nod in his own peculiar mode of greeting.

But De Nevailles, aware of Louis' curiosity, and afraid that it would end in some unpleasant exposure, and a consequent loss of control over the actions and ideas of the wood-cutter, resolved to rid himself of his presence before

daylight should display the marked difference of feature and costume between the Germans and the French cavalry.

As soon as he had led them into a road which avoided Bourges on the north, the Baron told him that, as the present spot was the nearest to the forest of Chambord in their line of march, he should not require his farther services. Louis dissented from this mode of reasoning, but De Nevailles was inflexible, and urged so many specious reasons for his departure, that the peasant was as mad to be gone as he had been before to stay with the regiment.

A heavy purse of gold, increased by the contributions of the Ritters—as an earnest of his future capfull—was put into his hands, to do what good he desired with. A loud border cry from the regiment saluted him in his northward path; and he departed, honoured beyond his heart's content, and dreaming of one day seeing his great friend the Protector on the throne of France.

CHAPTER XX.

Oh! how our hearts were beating, when, at the dawn of day,
We saw the army of the League drawn out in long array;
With all its priest-led citizens, and all its rebel peers,
And Appenzel's stout infantry, and Egmont's Flemish spears.
There rode the brood of false Lorraine, the curses of our land;
And dark Mayenne was in the midst, a truncheon in his hand:
And as we looked on them, we thought of Seine's empurpled flood,
And good Coligni's hoary hair all dabbled with his blood;
And we cried unto the living God, who rules the fate of war,
To fight for his own holy name, and Henry of Navarre!

HUGUENOT SONG.

THOUGH the Loire, deemed by Catherine and her military advisers an impregnable barrier to the junction of the Germans with the Huguenots, had been passed by the intrepid Ritters, yet their difficulties were not over. It required the greatest circumspection to avoid the large towns, and the detachments of Catholics on their march to the camp of De Joyeuse. But at length Angouleme was left to the north, and they entered a country

breathing of war; and were, according to the accounts of the inhabitants, equidistant from both armies.

While Turenne was undetermined whether to cross the Dronne at Riberac, or continue a south-westerly course along the banks of the stream, intelligence was brought to him that De Joyeuse with his army was in rapid march towards the plain which lies between the Dronne and the Lisle, from which station he had the power of either bringing the Huguenots to an engagement, or blocking them up in confined quarters.

This news determined the Viscount to the latter course. It was necessary for the safety of the Huguenots that they should be in possession of the plain as soon as the Catholics; otherwise, De Joyeuse might beat them off at the fords. Impressed with the necessity of this step, Turenne was anxious to reach Navarre's camp, and advise him to cross the river without delay.

As it happened, Navarre was marching towards the ford at Coutras, when the friendly forces met. It was imagined that D'Alençon, with his large army, was close at hand; and full of this hope, the Bourbon chief with his officers rode out to meet the Prince.

The joy was unbounded. Turenne and De Nevailles embraced Navarre as friends do after peril and misfortune. But when the first friendly salutations were over, and the King inquired for the Prince, who he imagined was with the main army, the Viscount shook his head. He had an unpleasant task to perform;—he depicted the condition of D'Alençon's army, its disorganization, and its probable defeat: or at least useless position far away from those to whom it could render service, harassed by an energetic and bitter foe, and disunited under an inefficient leader.

The Viscount had been always celebrated for his eloquence, both in conversation and in studied discourse; and the picture which he drew of the riotous, and consequently feeble, army, was painted with his usual skill.

"If they were but officered by Frenchmen," said Turenne, "they would hold all France in awe!" and he narrated the adventures of his own regiment from the period of its quitting Casimir's camp. Navarre was silent awhile; but his mind was busy.

"Since our German allies cannot come to us," said he, "we must go over to them. De Joyeuse stands in our path —let us put the valour of our old Huguenots to the test—

if we can defeat, or even elude him, we may yet join our friends!"

"Ere this he must have crossed the river," said Turenne, "and no doubt will turn round to dispute our passage at the ford!"

"I lodge to-night at Coutras, be that as it may!" cried Navarre.

The Ritters then passed in review before the King. Turenne made excuses for the irregularity of their equipments.

"We are no better off," replied Navarre, smiling; "rusty armour, worn-out arquebuses, and cannon with rotten carriages abound in our camp. But our hearts are of iron."

In truth, the Germans had no occasion to be ashamed in the company of their friends. The Huguenot army was composed chiefly of veterans who had fought under Coligni, and suffered alternate victory and defeat with that renowned old warrior. When Navarre, who in his youth had been proclaimed by Coligni the hereditary chief of their party, once more appeared among them, after his mysterious escape from Fontainebleau, they rallied with enthusiasm around the man whose presence they had invoked. The noble left his castle to display once more an unforgotten pennon in the cause of religion and toleration; the peasant brandished his trusty sword and pike, and followed his lord; while the brave and unflinching burghers, who had suffered many a cruel siege for the sake of their faith, declared their firm resolution to submit to the same dangers for the good cause in which they were embarked.

As the old Huguenot nobles looked upon each other's armour and ensigns, it seemed to them as though Coligni were alive; that he, whom defeat could never subdue, and who renewed his army and his strength as the sun renews its course, was about once more to lead them to the desperate fight. But the absence of many a friendly face reminded them of a sadder spectacle,—when the streets of Paris flowed with the blood of slaughtered guests invited to a marriage feast; when the bloody Charles, of infamous memory, encouraged by his presence the myrmidons of Catholic cruelty; and the fierce Tavannes gallopped up and down the ensanguined streets, his own pale features lit with the red glow of the murderers' torches, and crying out in a stern voice—"Bleed! Bleed! Bleeding is as healthy in August as in the month of May!"

This was a scene never to be forgotten by the veterans

who escaped the fearful banquet. But delight entered their souls when they beheld in the station of the venerable and majestic old Coligni the gallant Navarre, erst the young pupil of the admiral, but now a noble Prince in the lustre and prime of manhood. As he rode through their ranks with uncovered head, they took confidence in his heroic face, and chivalric mien, and gladly hailed him as the chief who was to deliver them from the most intolerable of oppressions; the thraldom of ecclesiastical bondage, and a life passed in the hourly dread of priestly cruelty.

With such advisers and friends as the Duke De la Tremouille, the Count De Grammont, the Baron De Rosny, Monsieur De Vivans, the Baron De Salignac, and many others, old and tried Huguenots, Navarre performed wonders in the organization of an army, without having at his command those necessary resources of money and military stores, without which, even the ill-equipped Germans could not have been assembled. But the love of the Huguenot noblesse and citizens for the cause they had so much at heart, triumphed over every obstacle, and enabled the monarch to oppose an army of veterans to the gorgeous armament of the royal favourite De Joyeuse.

Such was its condition when it received the reinforcement of Turenne's regiment. No time was lost in the march to Coutras; the King was bent on lodging there that night, and the intelligence brought by the Viscount confirmed him in his resolution. While Turenne was receiving the congratulations of the nobles on his desperate and successful attempt, Navarre and De Nevailles had leisure to confer with each other on many interesting topics.

"I owe all this noble array to you, Baron!" exclaimed the grateful prince, as they rode through the lines;—"you found me in my prison a sluggard almost beyond hope—but the free air of France has made me another man, as you shall witness when we encounter De Joyeuse."

"Valour, my liege," replied De Nevailles, with his usual boldness, "is but a secondary, though essential virtue. I look upon this well-disciplined army—the work of a brief span of time—as a greater triumph than if you had borne De Joyeuse and a score of his gentlemen to the dust. It is to me a stirring presage of future triumphs well sustained, and a success not easily to be lost—be-

coming one who strives with our great mistress—for such I must still call her—Catherine of France."

"Well thought of, De Nevailles," cried the Bourbon Prince; "she has a brave heart, and one that lives healthily in a sea of trouble, like a stout barque in our Biscay waters! Poor Villeroi! what a tale he had to tell of our hunting party! I should like to have been present, unseen, at the interview with the Queen-mother.—I suspect my capricious plague, Margaret, has fallen in for a share of the Queen's anger—yet Margaret has, I can assure you, both a soul and a tongue of her own! There would be a glorious contest!"

"Yes!" replied De Nevailles, "your royal consort would storm both heroically and pathetically; she is much taller and possesses equal fluency of language, but wants the concentrated strength or venom—if I may so express myself, without offence, for loss of a better word—of her subtle parent."

"Just so," said the nobler of these familiar worthies; "while Margaret was flourishing her weapon like a posture-master showing off his skill, Catherine would throw in the close rapid thrust that kills ere it is felt! What would our lady of the Louvre do with you, Baron, if she caught you?"

"I know not," replied De Nevailles, laughing; "it may be brought to the trial some day. If she could gain more by my life than in cutting off my head I should be safe—and it would be no difficult matter to persuade her to believe that—but failing there—the Chateau and Barony of De Nevailles would become the property of your Majesty, for I have no heirs."

"By the sigh which followed those words," said Navarre, looking at his friend, "you are not ambitious of dying in a condition to make me owner. It was a source of wonder to me that your heart was not pulled to pieces in that palace of beauty."

"I perceive I have lost the morality of the court," replied the Baron, "in living so much with these rough troopers—if speech or gesture of mine indicated a movement of the inward pulse. I must, like young urchins at fault, cry, that I was taken unawares—out of practice as I am! Fancy you never heard me sigh—for, believe me, I felt nothing."

"I'll try!" said Navarre, drily.

"Catherine," exclaimed the Baron, changing the subject, "knows not of the idendity of Villa Franca and De Nevailles; and I met a monk on my travels who said he had heard much of both gentlemen. This would have been delicious, had I been in the humour to enjoy it. As I shall wear my armour in the approaching encounter with the court-circle of military penitents, it may yet be kept a secret for a grand surprise on some future day. May I inquire if your Majesty knows any thing of my neighbours and my own train, who ought to be here?"

"I saw that rascally knave Antoine, yesterday," replied Navarre; "he and his fellows are with your friend Le Chatellet, and your neighbour the Baron D'Enghien, who muster sturdily, like true Bernese. They have your armour without doubt, unless Antoine has sold it—he looks rogue enough.

"He is very honest to me," said De Nevailles, "whatever he may be, or appear, to the world at large. He is mischievous and much too froward—but he can sound the hunter's horn even to your Majesty's taste," added the Baron, with a significant look at the Prince.

"I cannot find fault with his minstrelsy," replied the King, "nor even with his after services as my sole attendant to Rochelle—perhaps the only roguishness he deals in is wit—but here is De Vivans, our Marshal of the field!"

Monsieur De Vivans, the Marshal of the field—an office answering to that of Quarter-master General—approached Navarre to report concerning the disposition of the troops in crossing the ford, which was undefended by the enemy. The Duke De Joyeuse, it was understood, had crossed, or was crossing at Roche Chalais.

"Then we are too quick for him, Marshal," exclaimed the King; "let our cavalry occupy the park under arms, for I am sure the Duke will push forward his troopers to oppose us at the ford as soon as he has established his own passage!"

But we must now leave the Huguenot army in possession of the Chateau and domain of Coutras, to return to the Cordelier monk and his fair travelling charge at the village inn. Though Emilie had assumed a confidence with De Nevailles becoming the trying situation in which she was placed, yet it was in truth only assumed,

and dissolved away into grief with the abrupt departure of the Baron.

In the Louvre, the eccentric Villa Franca had offered her his friendship while he gained her love; yet, though she confessed the plea, she was unable to make a return of his confidence. The terms on which she had been permitted to enter the palace excluded confession; she had made a solemn promise to Catherine never to divulge her history to any one, until the Queen exonerated her from the charge of secrecy. The bond was still in force, though Catherine, by her cruel behaviour, had broken one of its conditions; for Emilie would never have consented to the terms, if she had known that after a brief sojourn with her protectress, Margaret, she was to be hurried off to a convent in a remote quarter of the kingdom. It would have been better if she had never crossed the portal of the prison-palace. Yet she had gained a friend in her splendid prison, which endeared it to her memory. How bitter her feelings upon reflecting, that although this friend had come to her assistance in the hour of need—that his presence seemed almost miraculous—yet that she was forced to separate from him, to his eyes, unkindly! But she had promised the Queen of Navarre to yield implicitly to the wishes of Catherine, that the suspicions of this subtle woman might be lulled, and a new course of action, meanwhile, decided on. The Cordelier, Confessor to the Queen of Navarre, also enjoyed the confidence of the Queen-mother, and had been selected by her to conduct Mademoiselle, as he was acquainted with her history. He guessed what was passing in the mind of Emilie, and strove to divert her attention from the sad parting which followed a meeting so happy.

"Let us leave this chamber of death," cried Emilie, who was afflicted at the sight of the blood which had been shed in her defence, and could not avoid resting her eyes on the saddening spectacle around.

"Let us first be assured that the Leaguers are gone," replied the Cordelier; "this remote corner would have been a *terra incognita* to any one but a German plunderer; and though Colonel St. Paul will protect us from insult, yet he cannot be every where."

So saying, the monk was about to leave the room, when Lisette cried out that she was afraid of staying in a room

with dead men; and that she was sure Mademoiselle Emilie was as frightened as herself.

"I am sure of the contrary," replied the Cordelier; "if you have any fear, repeat a prayer till I return!" And, despite her entreaties, at which Emilie smiled—though, to say the truth, she sympathized with her attendant—he left the room. Lisette caught hold of her mistress's arm, leaning over the chair, into which Emilie had sunk, when De Nevailles bade her adieu.

"And that poor young man too!" said the girl, venturing to look in the direction of the body of the servant—"poor fellow! he came to assist us against that ugly stranger, whom I dare not look at now for a world of wealth—his eyes gleamed so fiercely when he fought! I wish the Father would come back."

"Yes," said Emilie, trying to smile, "he is a match for all the dead men in France; and you know, Lisette, a holy man, like Father Roquelaure could appease their troubled ghosts if they were unquiet."

"Do not speak about their ghosts, Mademoiselle, or I shall fall in a fit again," said Lisette, clinging still closer to her mistress. "There! hark! O Father Roquelaure, save us! I am sure I heard a noise."

"It was the voice of your guilty conscience, Lisette," said Emilie, laughing aloud, as much to dissipate her own sense of dread, which she could not account for, save from the effects of her harassed mind, as to allay the fears of the attendant.

"Then—I— am sure my conscience was in that dead monster's throat!" replied the trembling girl. "O! that cruel monk, to leave us with such a wicked spirit!"

"Ask it to speak!" cried Emilie, amusing herself with her servant's terrors, though afraid herself to look at the body of the German.

Mademoiselle had scarcely spoken these words, when the sound of one breathing was heard distinctly; she unconsciously returned the pressure of the girl, who in alarm had grasped the hand of her mistress.

"It does—not—want ask-ing," stammered out Lisette. "Does it lift up its head, Mademoiselle?" added the girl, dropping on her knees by the chair, happily for her terror, on the opposite side to the stricken German.

"I do not know," said Emilie in alarm: I wish Father Roquelaure were come—the poor man must be alive!"

The breathing was again heard in the direction of the body.

"O!" cried Lisette, faintly; while her agitation was such as to shake her mistress's chair.

Emily had sufficient resolution to wait for the return of Roquelaure, without creating an alarm which might have attracted foes as well as friends. Lisette took the advice given her by the monk, and repeated a prayer as correctly as her fears would allow her; she still grasped the hand of her mistress, who did not attempt to withdraw it.

The friendly monk, however, soon returned, to dissipate their terrors; his cheerful countenance was a presage that the forces of St. Paul had left the village: but he had scarcely announced his intention of resuming his journey, when he was struck by the alarm visible in both mistress and attendant. Upon inquiring into the cause, Lisette ventured to look at the body of Freiberg, and shook her head. The attention of the monk being directed to the young soldier and student, whom he supposed dead, he strode up to the corpse, and bending over it, exclaimed, "*Non omnis moriar!* He will die in his bed yet! Praise be to heaven, the blood even of the guilty is not on my hands!"

The cordelier could not induce Lisette to render any assistance to the insensible yet breathing Ritter; he was obliged to call to his aid the host and his servants, who had crept out of their hiding-places upon the departure of the soldiery. Emilie gladly sought refuge in a less gloomy chamber; while Roquelaure, intent upon restoring animation to one who had fallen beneath his hand, carried the body of the young student to an adjoining room, which he would not quit till the lieutenant was so far recovered as to be conscious of his own existence, and of the presence of those around him.

As the monk imagined that the Ritter would meet with but little sympathy from those whom his comrades had plundered, he left strong injunctions upon the host to treat him kindly, and assist him to return to his own country. This office performed, the cordelier resolved to discharge his duty towards Emilie and her attendant, by escorting them to the convent of Avignon, selected by Catherine as the future residence of Mademoiselle, and where, after her year of probation, she was to become one of the sisterhood.

"We must thank our friend the Baron for our lowly

equipage," said Roquelaure, as they were on the point of starting with a solitary peasant, both guide and servant; "our noble escort is dispersed to every quarter whence the wind blows.

Emilie made no reply.

"I see," continued the cordelier, "that you are far gone in heresy. I do verily believe, that if the house of holiness to which we are bound, were stormed—before another year passed over your head—by that heretic Baron, you would smile on the sacrilege. By St. Francis! I am much to blame for my forbearance."

"If the Queen Margaret thought so, Father," replied Emilie meekly, "I am sure she would not have wished your sense of duty and goodness of heart to be at variance."

"Sense of duty! Goodness of heart!" repeated the monk, in a tone between solemnity and humour. "It is in this way I am always overcome. His Holiness once told me that I should never rise to eminence. What a misfortune for a man to have such an infirmity as goodness of heart. It causes me to promise fidelity to one queen, betray her secrets to another—become hand and glove with a determined heretic—a foe also in arms against my royal mistress. I shall begin soon to doubt the sincerity of my own faith. I tried once, by the queen's commands, to convert the King of Navarre, and the Prince De Condé, his late friend, to our holy religion. By St. Francis, I will never attempt a similar task again. Navarre yielded to my arguments because he was afraid of his neck, for our King Charles, whom you, Mademoiselle, never beheld, had threatened his life if he did not forsake heresy—but that stubborn little Condé was as firm as a rock. He and his fellow-prisoner, the King of Navarre, used to invite me to splendid banquetings, under pretence of hearing my doctrines, but in reality to make me feast like a layman."

It was after this fashion that the kind monk endeavoured to divert the melancholy of Emilie during their journey, in which task he was livelily assisted by Lisette, who was entirely in the confidence of her mistress. But we must return to Freiberg.

His wound was not of a serious nature, though it had stunned him for awhile; the awkward swordsmanship of the monk had saved his life. With reviving consciousness and strength came back the violent passions of his nature: he traced gradually in his memory the events which prece-

ded his fall, and vowed a heavy retribution on De Nevailles, who had robbed him of his prize. He cared no longer for his companions and their reckless pleasures: his whole thoughts were bent on revenge, to which he determined to devote his energies—even life itself.

A few days sufficed to restore him to a state of convalescence: and with a body yet weak, and suffering more from the nature of the remedies than the wound itself, and a mind fevered almost to madness, he left the village without hinderance—owing to the injunctions of the cordelier—and hastened toward the banks of the Loire. His steed, though refreshed with a rest of many days, could not travel rapidly enough for the ardent spirit which it bore: before they reached La Charité it fell exhausted, after two days' incessant travel. Fortunately for his safety, the troops of the League, defeated by De Joyeuse, had retreated from the province, and left the road clear. At La Charité he gave himself out to be a Catholic gentleman travelling from Bavaria to join the army of De Joyeuse; and out of the gold that had fallen to his share, he equipped himself in an entire suit of plain armour, worn by a man-at-arms in the late affray, but which had proved inefficient for his protection. With a strong horse to carry the mailed renegade, and a lance, in the use of which he was expert, our lieutenant of Ritters, unlike his comrades, who were forced to make a difficult passage at night, passed over the bridge at La Charité in the open day, and travelled by the route of Bourges, Chateauroux, and Argenton, to the south—arriving at the quarters of De Joyeuse at La Roche Chalais.

The astonishment of Freiberg was extreme in beholding on every side the careless profusion of riches and luxury. Instead of a beggarly display, like that exhibited by his own regiment, he beheld troops well fed and clothed—their armour bright and polished like the guards of a king. The tents were pitched so as to form an immense square composed of diagonal lines, encompassed by an outer square of rail-work, to which were attached the horses of the cavalry, and on which were hung the saddles and caparisons. The tents of the officers were of cloth ornamented with the heraldic insignia of their families, and worked either in gold or silver, as suited the colours of the field and charges; the apex of each tent being surmounted with one or more crests, or in their stead, narrow pennons charged with cognizances and arms. In the centre stood

the magnificent pavilion of De Joyeuse; nor could the master of this stately favourite have been more sumptuously lodged had he taken the field. It formed a long quadrangle, with a roof retreating on each side after the fashion of a Gothic church, and rounded at the corners. Along the ridge was planted a line of alternate pennons and crests, and in the middle arose the lofty standard of the house of Valois, quartered with the arms of Poland. The entire pavilion was composed of rich silk of a violet colour, with various arabesques and other devices of velvet of the same hue; and between the compartments of the raised velvet were worked innumerable fleurs-de-lis in gold. The entrance was at the side; and the heavy drapery which had been drawn aside, displayed a lining of white damask silk. Several lacqueys were loitering about the exterior of the pavilion; and as a mark of distinguished honour to the favourite from his liege, the entrance was guarded by the Swiss of the royal guard, whose immense height, singular costume of striped silk, long beards, and formidable halberds, were sufficient to realize a dream of oriental pageantry.

Freiberg, whose plans were already cast, as a preliminary step, sought an interview with De Joyeuse. He was not allowed to ride within the tented ground, but was conducted on foot to the pavilion. A curtain of damask, stretched across the opening, hid the interior from his view; and he remained at the portal while the officer retired to communicate his desire to the Duke. He had not waited many minutes ere a herald returned to conduct him: as Freiberg followed this officer, he could not help longing to deprive him of his glittering dress, which consisted of a tabard of violet-coloured velvet, charged with the gold fleur-de-lis, and a crowned eagle, quarterly; the last being the national bearing of Poland. He thought of his old troopers, Ezzelin and Schwartz, and how greedily their eyes would have drunk up the splendour of the pavilion.

It was divided into two sections. On the right was a banqueting room of lofty dimensions, hung from the roof to the floor with white damask, relieved by burnished weapons and suits of armour suspended from the walls. A long table stood in the centre covered with the richest plate, while servants were busy in preparing for the feast, of which the renegade lieutenant was determined, if possible, to have a share. This chamber was divided from the

other by drapery of the same colour and quality as we have just before mentioned. The hall to the left, through which Freiberg was conducted after his peep at the banquet-room, was, as the herald informed him, the general audience-chamber, where the officers reported their labours and received instructions: several of the Swiss guard were stationed here for the personal protection of the general; to these the lieutenant gave his helmet in charge. Beyond, the remaining space was allotted into two chambers: one a private room of audience, and the other leading from it the sleeping apartment of De Joyeuse.

Close to the room of audience, the herald struck the floor several times with his wand, and then, drawing aside the heavy drapery, Freiberg walked in alone, the curtain falling behind him. The light of day being closely shut out from his chamber, it was illuminated by four tripod lamps of stature loftier than man. At the farther end the Duke was seated on a couch, and before him stood a small ivory table, on which lay an escritoir and several papers. He was unarmed, and dressed in a close habit of figured silk bound with a girdle, from which were suspended a dagger on one side and a purse on the other: a loose trunk of velvet reached half way to the knees, while the rest of the leg was encased in a hose of white silk, fitting closely to the limb. This was the fashion of the preceding reign, which De Joyeuse, in spite of the young nobles who pretended to regulate the costume of the court, retained in preference to the existing fashion.

It was not without a start of surprise at the repulsive features and uncouth figure of the student, which even his armour could not conceal, that the Duke received the Baron Von Grunberg—for such had our friend Freiberg designated himself. But there was an inward assurance in the young man which fully compensated for outward defects; retaining no sensitivenes of personal defect, he did not notice the reserve of the Catholic general, but carried himself with an air which marked the entire absence of doubt with regard to his reception.

This deportment could not fail of success: it was natural and unassumed—the result of his education; as a student he cared for no superior—as a freebooting soldier he treated as nought all authority; and now—that deep hatred and desire of revenge had wrought on him to assume the name of a distant relative, and a feigned religion—he

wore the double imposture as easily as his gantlet and cuirass. De Joyeuse was constrained to treat him with respect; and as the object of his interview had preceded his presence, the conversation immediately turned to that point.

"We are proud of the honour you do us," said De Joyeuse, as soon as the Ritter was seated, "which we cannot but attribute to the holy cause we uphold; and which has been the earnest policy of our royal princes, since heresy first sprang up like a poisonous weed in our happy soil. We have many gentlemen of your land in our camp, as brave and noble soldiers as the best of us—but as chance or accident generally determines a man to join even the noblest of adventures, when it lies far distant from his track, may I inquire what motive beyond an earnest faith, determined one so young to join our armament?"

This speech, more verbose than even the learned De Biron would have uttered in a camp, did not in anywise stagger the lieutenant, who even tried in his reply to catch the stately tone of the illustrious speaker.

"A boyish spirit of enterprise," said he, "to fight for the faith which my ancestors died for, and a desire to seek renown under the eyes of one of those noble generals who adorn the court of the famed Catherine, were sufficient to make me endure the perils which I have encountered in the journey."

"You speak bravely," said De Joyeuse, relaxing from his reserve.

Freiberg bowed; saying to himself the while, "Yes, and I wish old Ezzelin were behind that curtain to hear me."

But much as Freiberg was indebted to his assurance for this reception, he had not relied on a quality which he was scarcely aware he possessed; his intention was to ingratiate himself with the general, through the information which he had the power of communicating respecting the provinces over which he had travelled, and the parties whose strength predominated in them. To this end he related his travels:—the offer which had been made to him to join the Leaguers, and his escape from their quarters, lest an open refusal would have placed him in jeopardy; his coming in contact with his heretical countrymen, whose licentiousness and rapine he depicted with a tone of assumed disgust—(though secretly laugh-

ing over many a brave exploit)—his quarrel with them—which had terminated so unfortunately to himself. He showed the wound which Roquelaure had inflicted, attributing it to his plundering countrymen, who robbed him of horse and armour, leaving him for dead on the roadside; next followed his recovery, and painful journey on foot to La Charité, where the purse which he had concealed, enabled him to re-equip himself in a style befitting the field of warfare he was about to enter. The facility with which these lies were uttered, as well as the satisfaction which he appeared to give the Duke in the replies to his inquiries concerning the forces of the Protector of the League, as also of his countrymen under the Duke D'Alençon, surprised even himself. De Joyeuse learned enough to make a long despatch to the Queen on matters which she could hardly be aware of; and as the truth must be told, could only be obtained from their inventor, though much that was valuable was mixed up with his creations. Had the Duke been asked his opinion of Von Grunberg, he might have said that he was an ugly toad, but possessed that reptile's jewel in his head.

"If I can but get a post among these idolatrous papists," said Freiberg to himself, "I'll bring De Nevailles and the Colonel to grovel together in the dust. That pretty Catholic too! they shall rue my loss of her."

"You look pale and dejected, Baron," cried the Duke, "you are not yet free from the weakness which followed your wound—but I can promise you ample revenge on the allies of your thievish countrymen. To-morrow I shall force them to fight or surrender. These heretics of our land, whom we call Huguenots, require every six or eight years a severe flagellation, which we shall continue to administer till they are wholly extinguished. Just now they are gay and spirited enough, in consequence of the *prestige* which attaches to the name of their new chief—one defeat will set that at rest, and they will go home with a sickness which will last the usual term. If old Coligni were alive, I should be as much afraid of defeating him, as of his proving victor; for the admiral was like an unquiet spirit which a necromancer has raised, but cannot easily lay again."

Freiberg, who with the eyes of a Ritter was more intent on surveying the costliness of the pavilion, than listening to the harangue of the general, could not help re-

marking on the difficulty which must attend the transport of such a luxurious camp.

"The road has been travelled so often, Baron," replied the Duke, smiling; "as I have just told you, I am about performing a task which is required every half dozen years—it is a mere summer journey;—the army marches to Orleans, Tours, or Saumur, and from thence we drop into the Huguenot country as pleasantly as we pass to our chateaux after a long sojourn in Paris. The Loire shuts in our game, and we have a noble *battue*."

"Yet I was told at La Charité," rejoined Von Grunberg, "that a regiment of my countrymen had crossed it without difficulty."

"Tut," cried De Joyeuse hastily, "a few hundreds splashed in at night—but half of them were lost in the deeps of the stream, and the remainder starved under the bushes, like drones far away from their cells."

"May I be struck dead if I believe that!" cried the Lieutenant, dashing his mailed arm on the ivory table, in a rage at the implication cast on his old comrades, "they would eat steed and saddle both, rather than sit and starve; ay, and make bullets of the horses' hoofs, by holy"——Luther, he was about to add, but beholding the consternation and surprise of the general, was put in mind of his own danger, and wisely desisted.

"Monseigneur," cried he, rising, "they are my countrymen, and they would face the devil; yes, they would spit in his face, if their arms were lopped off!—but, Monseigneur, I beg your pardon—I am fevered, and scarce know what I say."

"You look pale indeed, and very ill," replied the compassionate noble, who had risen in anger and suspicion at the first burst, but was again soothed by the dexterous turn of the wild Ritter; "you have not fed well of late—bad food waits on solitary travellers, but you shall soon eat better fare. Have you any letters to your countrymen, or to any of my officers?"

"They were all taken from me with my horse and armour," replied Freiberg.

"Well, well! exclaimed the Duke, "it matters not. The best introduction to a camp is a brave spirit—you have exhibited perseverance by the length of your journey—let to-morrow be witness to your valour! You shall

have opportunity. Hah! the pale cheek is flushed—this is as it should be! Dauphiny!

At this call, the herald who styled himself of that province, entered.

"Are our guests ready?" asked the Duke.

"They are waiting, Monseigneur," replied the Dauphiny herald. Montjoie king-at-arms never left his sovereign, so that the favourite was forced to put up with a lower grade of the college, and had brought with him the provincial one just named.

"Now, Baron, our friends will revive your spirits," cried the Duke.

As they passed through the general audience chamber, the Swiss stood to their arms;—Freiberg was forced to turn aside his eyes for fear of laughing in the face of the bearded giant who had the care of his helmet.

"Whether Huguenot or Catholic win, I shall be right," said the dwarfish warrior to himself as he attended the magnificent leader of the Catholics to the banqueting room.

CHAPTER XXI.

The King is come to marshal us, in all his armour drest,
And he has bound a snow-white plume upon his gallant crest.
He looked upon his people, and a tear was in his eye;
He looked upon the traitors, and his glance was stern and high.
Right graciously he smiled on us, as rolled from wing to wing,
Down all our line, a deafening shout, "God save our Lord the King."
"And if my standard-bearer fall, as fall full well he may,
"For never saw I promise yet of such a bloody fray,
"Press where you see my white-plume shine, amidst the ranks of war,
"And be your oriflamme to-day, the helmet of Navarre."

HUGUENOT SONG.

THE Ritter perceived a great change in the appearance of the saloon. The table was covered with a profusion of viands, and encircled by a retinue of brilliant guests, who wondered who the ugly little fellow accompanying their leader might be; but speculation was soon at an end

by the Duke introducing him as the Baron Von Grunberg, a Catholic nobleman of the country beyond the Rhine, who had come to share with them the glory of extinguishing heresy in a blaze of chivalry. No farther ceremony was necessary; and as there remained much to do between the interval of dinner and the hour of rest, they quickly fell to eating—a feat which the lieutenant was as adapted to perform as any of the company.

But even while engaged in this employment, Von Grunberg could not help pausing at intervals to enjoy the splendour which greeted his eyes on every side; like the private audience chamber, the light of day could find no egress, save a stray beam or so, paled in the brilliant effulgence of the lamps, throwing into alternate shadow and strong light, the lustrous armour and arms which decorated the walls. He noticed also in a corner of the saloon a table, on which lay a superb suit of armour, russet-colour, interlined with gold; a lacquey was adjusting the mixed plume of heron and ostrich feathers on the helmet. This, thought he, is the armour of De Joyeuse; and a thrill of pleasurable emotion ran through his nerves as he contemplated the sacking of such a wondrous camp. An event not impossible, although he was an ally; if he could but wreak his vengeance on De Nevailles, he had no enmity against Navarre, and might win his friendship by a bold manœuvre.

There were a few veterans present, but the company was chiefly composed of young nobles of the court —penitential brethren who had doffed their woollen for an iron robe—the young Catholic noblesse of the provinces bound to do suit and service—and several officers of the Swiss Catholic cantons. The active and experienced officers of the camp had much better employment to perform than feasting in the afternoon beneath the glare of artificial day.

Among others, the Lieutenant could not avoid noticing a gentleman whose age might be fairly guessed at thirty years; he was handsome, though it were difficult to say in what his beauty consisted—or whether it was not the refined air and aristocratic cast of his features, which impressed the beholder with such a favourable opinion of his face. His cuirass was a perfect model for an armourer, and fitted his shape almost as closely as a doublet, for which it might easily have been taken at a distance; and

the deception was enhanced by its hue of green, ornamented with devices of a darker colour. The pauldrons or shoulder-plates were of bright metal, as also were the vambraces which enclosed the arms, but the pass-guards, the grenouillieres, and all the sinuosities of the joints and clasps were of the same dark hue as the cuirass. He spoke but little, though his reserve did not spring either from contempt of his companions, or their want of respect; what he uttered was listened to with attention even by De Joyeuse; to the Ritter, who, however he was not skilled in these niceties, he appeared to labour under a fastidiousness which oppressed his delivery. But such a man would not have excited the attention, unless it were contemptuously expressed, of the Lieutenant, had it not been for the cuirass, which he at the first glance mistook for a doublet of green velvet. The Count De Quelus was not, however, a man to be despised.

The repast was scarcely over, when a man of distinguished bearing, a veteran past the meridian of life, entered the pavilion, and without any preface said—"It is quite true, Monseigneur, Navarre will not move a step from Coutras—he is lodged as safely as a fox in his hole."

"So much the better, Marshal," replied De Joyeuse rising, "we have now got the enemy betwixt two rivers, so that he cannot possibly escape us."—Then turning to his guests, he added, "Let every man be ready for battle to-morrow at break of day."

A burst of enthusiasm caught the nobles, who arose instinctively, uttering cries of *Vive Valois!* Montjoie St. Denis!

"Montjoie St. Denis!" cried Von Grunberg, who had stayed to finish his bumper.

Quelus eyed the speaker with curiosity.

"Marshal Lavardine," said De Joyeuse, addressing the veteran, "I have summoned Navarre once. Twice more he must be summoned by her Majesty's and our Liege's orders, ere a lance be set in rest. Let Dauphiny proceed thither!"

The herald entered to receive his orders, which were that he should again proceed to Coutras, and summon the King of Navarre to disband his forces and retire to Pau, under pain, in case of refusal, of forfeiture of his

kingdom; and to his advisers and abettors, subjects of France, the loss of their estates.

"And tell De Vivans," cried Lavardine, who was marshal of the field, holding the same post with the Catholics as the Sieur De Vivans with the Huguenot army, "that my pennon still bears the silver billets."

"Aye, and tell Navarre," exclaimed De Joyeuse, "to seek me beneath the standard of Valois!"

"And, Dauphiny," cried the knight of the green cuirass, "let De Salignac know that the Count De Quelus is in the royal camp."

"The like challenge from Bourdeille to De Rosney!" shouted another voice.

"The same from De Matignon to De Grammont," echoed another.

"Another fall to De la Tremouille from De Chaligny," cried a third.

The challenges flew so thick and fast that poor Dauphiny looked quite bewildered; De Joyeuse to his great relief told him to hasten on, and that the cartels of the gentlemen should be fairly inscribed and forwarded to the enemy's camp, if they desired.

"There is one whom I must challenge," said Freiberg to himself, "and my cartel shall soon be ready."

Hereupon he left the saloon, and procuring writing materials, addressed the following:—

"To the Baron De Nevailles.

"If you have courage to make reparation for injury, do not turn aside, but seek one who wears plain armour and a black scarf. Adieu."

This epistle he despatched by the hands of a lansquenet, after the herald, and returned to the saloon muttering—"Let me but meet him to-morrow, and I care not if the devil comes to his aid, though in the shape of a vile priest."

De Joyeuse was glad to perceive a change for the better in his foreign ally, and as he had despatches to prepare, and instructions to deliver, he left him to the care of the officers, who soon after quitted the table, all but the Swiss allies, with whom Freiberg soon became on intimate terms; and they talked and drank with each

other till the saloon of the general resembled, in its uproar, the common room of an inn.

Meanwhile the Dauphiny herald, accompanied by a trumpeter and two men-at-arms in bright armour, traversed the extensive plain between the encampments, which gradually lessened till it terminated in a peninsula between the two rivers La Dronne and L'Isle, where Navarre had sheltered himself, contiguous to the village of Coutras; his head-quarters being at the chateau, a handsome edifice built by Lautrec, who fought in the Italian wars.

The chateau stood on a gentle elevation, which had been converted by the architect into a terrace by rendering the descent more abrupt, and its length more even, than nature, which delights in curves, had left it. The perspective gradually narrowed between the trees, and terminated in a view of the southern hills, the river L'Isle being only visible from the upper windows.

When Dauphiny and his companions turned into the glade in front of the chateau, the park and the terrace were dotted over with the tents of the Huguenots, and groups of their soldiery engaged in preparing their arms for the anticipated battle. The standard of Navarre floated over the terrace; beneath its fluttering folds were standing a crowd of officers seemingly in earnest conversation. The Catholic mission had already passed the outposts on the plain, but as a matter of form, the herald commanded the trumpeter to sound a parley; which he blew ever and anon, making the woods tuneful with the echoes, while the glittering cortege slowly approached the terrace.

It was Navarre himself, who had drawn together his brave adherents to encourage them in their confidence and devotion to his cause.

"Another message from the haughty Catholic!" he exclaimed, as the clang of the trumpet was borne along the breeze.

"Your Majesty has no such gaudy butterflies in your camp as those yonder!" exclaimed De Vivans, noticing the banner which hung from the enemy's trumpet.

"No, Marshal," replied the King, "but we may have after the battle."

This sally told well with the old Huguenot nobles, whose dingy armour, and weapons rusty with the rain which had

fallen daily since their muster in the mountainous country through which they had marched, looked dismal enough, when contrasted with the burnished cuirasses of the Catholics.

On arriving at the foot of the terrace, the herald dismounted, and coming up the ascent, saluted the King.

"Well! Dauphiny," he cried, in a jocular strain;" an honest face cannot be seen too often."

"Nor a tale of warning told too many times, may it please your Majesty," replied the herald.

"We know by rote what you are about to say, rejoined Navarre, "but out with it; I like the sound of your voice; —it is akin to the trumpet—a fellowship and sympathy have grown between them!"

The Huguenots listened with a smile on their lips, while the herald informed his Majesty that he bore a message from Anne, Duke De Joyeuse, Colonel-general of the army of the South, of his most Christian Majesty, the King of France and Poland; Admiral of France, and a knight of his Majesty's orders of St. Michael and the Holy Ghost! Then followed the summons to disband his forces, and send home the subjects of France who served under his orders.

"Hear us for once and ever," replied Navarre, to the challenge; "we are not in arms to rob peaceable burgesses of their hand-earned money—neither do we seek aggrandizement, or to enlarge our territories. Look around upon this noble company, and tell the Duke De Joyeuse whom you have beheld here,—tell him—and you, herald of Dauphiny, know these matters well—tell him, that you have seen the best blood of France, the descendants of heroes who have fought for her honour in every age, from the illustrious Charlemagne to the gallant Francis—tell him, that you have seen veterans who were praised by this chivalric Prince for their fidelity to his throne, now rallying around the lesser house of Bourbon. And tell him for why —that his royal mistress may hear once more the truth! Say, that since the death of Francis, of happy memory, the gallant descendants of the peers of Charlemagne, a race as old as the monarchy itself, and as attached to it as they are to the dictates of conscience, which they would hold as free as their swords—have been oppressed from year to year with intolerable cruelty—that their families have been slaughtered—their strongholds razed to the ground

—their lands ravaged—the ministers of their faith persecuted like the beasts of the field—and by whom? By the princes whose crown and kingdom were first cemented by the blood of their ancestors! And under what plea?—Shame to the throne of Charlemagne, that the kings who hold his sceptre should persecute to death their vassals out of a fancied duty to the Bishop of Rome! The iron crown of the great monarch has been changed for one of gold; and with it, have changed the freedom of his peers, the liberty and privilege of conscience of their descendants! But hear us, representative of your monarch!—We might appeal to the stirring inborn right which every man feels within himself, of liberty to worship his God after his own heart—but we appeal only to that code which even Valois must listen to—we appeal to the laws of Charlemagne, and we ask your master and our master—for he is still such—to show us the law by which our consciences are to be controlled. Does he dispute the laws derived from Charlemagne—then let him ask himself where is the security of his own crown, for it is held on equal terms with our privileges!

"Say that we are in arms for liberty of conscience, and will continue so, till every Huguenot of France is allowed to receive instructions from the ministers of his own faith without let or hinderance.

"Say this—and tell the Duke De Joyeuse that our soldiers are poorly fed, scantily clothed, and almost famished; and that they look upon his splendour with a jealous eye. Let him advance, or we must come to his camp for provisions. Now, herald! you have your answer!"

A murmur of applause burst from the gallant train. The herald bowed lowly, and having promised to deliver the defiance of the King of Navarre, retired in the same order in which he had arrived, having first discharged his memory of the many challenges which it contained, and delivered up a letter addressed to the Baron De Nevailles, which had been intrusted to his care.

When the herald had retired, Navarre turned to his officers, and asked if he had compromised the safety of any of them. He was answered with acclamations of devotion to his cause and their own.

"None!" continued the monarch;—"then let to-morrow prove our brotherhood and fidelity to each other. Those woods hide from us the field where liberty must

struggle with bigotry—where cruelty and pride will strive against freedom of conscience—but who can doubt of victory?" added he, in a tone of enthusiasm which thrilled through the bosoms of the stern Huguenots.

Again the air was rent with shouts, mixed with the martial clang of armour, as the fearless soldiers waved aloft their mailed arms. The sound was borne to the most distant tents and outposts of the camp, and echoed back to the terrace in the voices of thousands of the brave iron-clad followers of Navarre.

The King, with his Marshal of the field, De Vivans, then issued on the plain to reconnoitre the probable scene of action.

"We shall have, at least, the choice of our ground," said De Vivans, as they surveyed the field; and that park wall will save our being outflanked on the right, while the river will do us the same good office on the left."

"And that mound on the river's bank," cried Navarre, "it will mount our cannon admirably—I should not desire a more destructive battery. The mouths of the pieces will not be perceived amid the brushwood and grass."

"We must have some culverins in front to deceive the enemy," said De Vivans, who immediately gave orders for the presence of the master of the artillery.

De Nevailles, who had quitted Turenne's regiment of Ritters to put himself at the head of his Navarrese friends and his own retainers, received the cartel of Freiberg without being able to recollect any one whose enmity he had excited. Freiberg he had forgotten, or gave the Cordelier credit for having inflicted a death-blow with his formidable arm; and though the enemies of Villa Franca were numerous, yet they would not seek to expiate their enmity upon the Baron De Nevailles, a stranger to the intrigues of the Louvre. Finding that remembrance could not bring to mind the identity of the antagonist, he threw the letter aside, resolved to leave the fate of his unknown foe to chance.

"It must be a cheat of my friends here," muttered the Baron, "for who would not subscribe his name to a just quarrel?"

CHAPTER XXII.

Hurrah! the foes are moving. Hark! to the mingled din
Of fife, and steed, and trump, and drum, and roaring culverin.
The fiery Duke is pricking fast across Saint Andre's plain,
With all the hireling chivalry of Guelders and Almayne.
Now by the lips of those ye love, fair gentlemen of France,
Charge for the golden lilies,—upon them with the lance.
A thousand spurs are striking deep, a thousand spears in rest,
A thousand knights are pressing close behind the snow-white crest;
And in they burst, and on they rushed, while like a guiding star,
Amidst the thickest carnage blazed the helmet of Navarre.

HUGUENOT SONG.

THERE was too much at stake on the issue of the battle for Navarre to enjoy the repose which happily fell to the share of his brave soldiers. The sun which ushered in that sanguinary morn, saw the two armies in battle array, between the domain of Coutras, and the camp at Roche Chalais. The artillery of the Catholics was planted in terrific show in front of their line; behind it was stationed the pennon of Marshal Lavardine, charged with eleven silver billets; and beneath the insignia of his ancestors, was seen the Marshal himself, armed *cap-à-pie*, lance in hand; his white horse almost as heavily encased in armour as his own noble person; for the military appointments of the age boasted of the two extremes of ancient and modern warfare. Cannon had been long of destructive service to the armies of Christendom; arquebuses, matchlock guns, and pistols, had displaced—but in a portion of an army only—the spear and bow of the purely chivalric era; pikemen and lansquenets were yet deemed of service in a field which blazed with the sweeping fire of artillery, and the rattling of the lesser but equally fatal messengers of death. Switzerland sent forth her legions of spearmen, who stood in every field, behind a chevaux-de-frise of glittering steel; Albania lent her lancers, who scoured the plain like the mamelukes of Egypt; regiments of mounted arquebusiers united the close destructive fire of infantry with the celerity of dragoons.—Where then had the pomp of chivalry taken refuge? Where it had ever shone brightest;—in the ranks of the noblesse.

A French gentleman of the reign of the third Henry, armed for the field, differed not materially in his appointments from his ancestor, who fought when Bretagne and Burgundy were independent sovereignties; his armour was even more perfect than in the days of Agincourt and Crecy; and his barbed steed displayed a poitrine, or breastplate, and the chanfron for the protection of the head and neck, as in the days of tournament of the twelfth Louis. A matchlock pistol was, perhaps, the only addition to his means of offence or defence. Nor was the marshalling in the field of the noblesse different from that of the previous era; while the regiments of arquebusiers and spearmen assumed a regular discipline, and moved only in obedience to their officers—the gentry, as of old, clustered in a gallant body, independent, yet united in spirit, and charged in a body aronnd the person of their sovereign or leader. But whereas, in the lustier career of chivalry, the free companies and disciplined troops were merely an adjunct to the army, and seldom relied on as a means of victory, now, they were regarded as the main battle, and the mailed noblesse, as an important division only. Such was the condition of the combatants on the plain of Coutras.

In the centre of the Catholic army were the chivalry of Valois, and the companies of men-at-arms of the Monarch. led on by the Duke De Joyeuse in person, whose russet and gold armour was distinguished beneath the royal standard. The mass of plumage waved to and fro, and danced like a field of corn shaken by the wind. The left wing was composed of a phalanx of Swiss spearmen, as firm and compact as a rock; it was flanked by mounted arquebusiers; the right wing was formed chiefly of cavalry, consisting of the Albanian lancers, the arquebusiers, and a strong corps of pikemen.

The Huguenots, though not so numerous, were more advantageously posted. Their centre was commanded by Navarre; it boasted of full a thousand gentlemen ready to die for the holy cause they had espoused, but resolute to achieve a victory for their suffering brethren in faith; they were supported by a corps of retainers, mostly veterans, who had followed of old their masters to the field, and thrice their number. The right wing was composed of arquebusiers mounted, the Ritters under Turenne, and bands of brave Huguenot pikemen; it was led on by the Duke De la Tremouille. The left wing was commanded

by the Marshal De Vivans, and consisted part of pikemen, and part of arquebusiers, all foot soldiers. The few pieces of artillery presented a miserable contrast to the cannon of the Catholics; but the strength of the Huguenots lay in their position; it was impossible to outflank them; their right wing was protected by thick woods, and a lofty wall, enclosing a detached garden of the mansion; the left wing stretched to the river, and the mound on its banks, where lay in ambush a formidable enemy.

Dauphiny, for the third time, summoned Navarre and his rebellious heretics to lay down their arms; but as he rode across the space between the two armies, he was received by the Huguenots with shouts of laughter. His duty performed, he retired within his own lines to communicate the defiance to De Joyeuse; every tongue was now hushed with dread expectation; every bosom, Catholic and Huguenot, beat with emotion at the approaching banquet of war:—but there was a pause, as though each were afraid to taste first of the fearful pleasure.

De Nevailles was among the throng of gentry who surrounded their beloved leader. When the herald retired within the lines all was as silent as if it were only a painted picture that he looked upon, and it seemed to his fancy that the elements first broke the calm;—a light breeze rising, fluttered the royal standard, and the next instant, the cannoniers advancing at the wave of Lavardine's lance, silence was broken by the loud roar of artillery. Yet but little mischief was done, for the cannon being pointed too low, only ploughed up the ground in front of Navarre's chivalry.

The few pieces of cannon in the van had deceived Lavardine in the ordnance of the Huguenots; the Albanian lancers were ordered to advance and charge the left wing under De Vivans; but in mid-career they were met by a discharge from the masked cannon pointed from the bank; and as the appropriation of the mound had not been suspected, and the mouths of the pieces were hidden, no defence had been opposed to it; and the cannoniers pointed so closely, that each ball made an avenue through the Albanians, and finished its destructive career by an oblique traverse through the Swiss battalions of the remote wing of the Catholic army.

But De Joyeuse seeing that another such discharge would disorder his battalion, resolved to crush the foe with the

weight of his chivalry: at his battle-cry, the mass of Catholic noblesse and men-at-arms put lance in rest, and rushed to the encounter,

"Now for the Bourbon and Notre Dame," shouted Navarre to his gallant friends, who poised their lances, and clapping spurs to their horses, swept on like a hurricane of death.

The ground shook and groaned beneath the heavy tread of the horses' hoofs, and when the rival forces met with a shivering clash, the air was filled with the din and clanging of the lances against the iron cuirasses of the opponents. The plumage danced and was dashed about like young saplings beneath the wrath of a storm. Though the concussion and rattling of arms was incessant, yet it was drowned in the voices of the combatants, who recognised each other, and shouted out mutual defiance as they closed in mortal fight; the royal cry of *Montjoie St. Denis*, was lost and mixed with the Bourbon war-note of *Montjoie Notre Dame*.

Montjoie de Bourbon! Montjoie de Vivans! burst from the impatient battalions under the Marshal De Vivans, which, excited to a pitch of enthusiasm by the gallant contest of the centre division, called upon their leader to charge the already disordered Albanian horsemen. But the Marshal was saved this exertion, for the colonel of the Albanians, Mercurio Bua, the very type of his men,—a grim-looking soldier, with a rough beard which brushed his cuirass, his head covered with a skull-cap, like the modern Greek capote, rallied his troopers in the open space, and brought them down upon the Huguenots with the speed of greyhounds. De Vivans commanded his men to halt and receive the foe upon their pikes, but the Albanians bounded among his ranks like a shower of arrows, and with a power which forced the pikemen to the ground, beneath the impetuosity of the shock. Their lances opened a clear way through the battalions—yet, to the astonishment of the Marshal, they did not turn round and renew the fight, but rode on towards the park and Huguenot encampment.

"They are gone with the wind," cried De Vivans, "but they will not find much treasure in our camp." Like the Ritters, they had a talent for the appropriation to themselves of the merchandise and valuables of others, and

were soon too busy searching the wains and tents of the Huguenots to think of returning to the field.

Such an eccentric course produced a hearty laugh among the soldiers of the discomfited division; and the Marshal, taking advantage of their humour, led them, amid the echoing shouts of *Montjoie de Bourbon*, to the assistance of Navarre and his chivalry.

Henry was indeed severely pressed by the superior force and equal bravery of the Catholic gentry; the disadvantage was not perceived during the first burst, while the ardour of the combatants was at its height, but when the ardent spirits of the Huguenots had settled to their task, they found strength opposed to superior strength; while their numerous adversaries, many of whom had not yet found an antagonist, and were panting for the encounter, endeavoured to surround them on all sides. But the more they were pressed, the more resolutely and firmly they withstood the encroachments of the Catholics, and Navarre, who had thrown aside his lance, engaged hand to hand with his foes; De Joyeuse he could not approach through the bristling spears of his friends, but in Lavardine he found an adversary worthy of his prowess.

Never did aid come more opportunely than in the person of De Vivans, with his battalions of pikemen; and so sudden was their irruption—for the defection of the Albanians had given them a clear field—that while their war-cry burst upon the ears of the Catholics their stout pikes were surrounding the foes with threatening destruction. Now came the hour of triumph for the Huguenots; the companions of De Joyeuse were either pressed to the ground, or their horses slain under them by the energy of the Marshal's division, anxious to wipe off the disgrace they had suffered from the lancers. The Catholic chivalry were forced to give way to their new enemies; Lavardine was separated from Navarre by the rush of the pikemen, who for a while bore the brunt of the battle to their own cost, till the Huguenot nobles gaining fresh strength, again pressed upon their foes. At a tournament in the reign of Catherine's husband, the second Henry, Lavardine had suffered a severe fall from the Sieur De Vivans, which was the cause of the hostile message the latter had received from the camp at Roche Chalais; and being anxious to repeat the offence, or give the Lord of Malicorne his re-

venge, he kept a look-out for his rival. In the *melée*, Lavardine heard himself called by name: the cry came from De Vivans,—they recognised each other—and clapping spurs to their horses, lances in rest, renewed the gentle sport of the by-gone period—the horse of Lavardine knocking down and trampling to death an unfortunate pikeman, who by chance stood between their long-cherished anger. But this unlucky impediment disordered the career of the Lord of Malicorne; and his eye losing its aim, the lance of his opponent came full against his breast, and threw him out of his saddle.

A cry of rescue arose from the friends of the fallen Marshal, which Navarre hearing, and being anxious to save the life of his valiant foe, rode up quickly to the spot. But the case was not so desperate; the Catholic gentry, although their corps were retreating, formed a circle of spears around the Lord of Malicorne, who was only bruised through the fall, and who speedily recovered his seat, and retired behind the shelter of his friends.

While the fortune of the field was so bravely contested in the centre, the Duke De la Tremouille, who commanded the right wing of Navarre's army, advanced with the Ritters and mounted arquebusiers, and a battalion of pikemen, to attack the phalanx of Swiss, whose overthrow would have decided the battle. The Duke again and again led on the Ritters and arquebusiers, without making any impression on the foes, who stood their ground firmly; while the Ritters, having discharged their pistols, and being destitute of lances, could not cope with the men-at-arms and spearmen, who had advanced to support the Swiss halberdiers; and these brave mountaineers taking courage at the repulse of the cavalry employed to break their lines, advanced like a mighty ocean, threatening to overwhelm every thing in its course.

De la Tremouille and his soldiers were forced to give way to this formidable phalanx of infantry, whose halberds presented a moving barrier impenetrable to assault, and destructive in its advance.

But, on the other hand, the Catholic chivalry had been completely disordered; while Navarre and his brave companions, flushed with success, and indignant at the sight of victory about to be wrested from their grasp by ignoble spearmen, rushed to the assistance of De la Tremouille. The light-armed Ritters, who had been wheeling, and ca-

reering, and retreating, before the steady advance of the Swiss, now left a clear field to their friends.

It was the most interesting turn of the battle. The Catholic nobles had been beaten down, dismounted, or forced to retreat, by the united struggling of the Navarrese pikemen and their sovereign's chivalry, who now, at his bidding, lowered their lances, struck spurs into their horses' sides, and uttering cries of *Montjoie de Bourbon*, rushed upon the advancing line of Swiss; who, beholding the threatening war-storm, halted, locked the intricate heads of their halberds one within the other, the second ranks performing the same manœuvre, their long weapons projecting even with the foremost ranks so that they were all linked as one man. Onward came the gallant knights of Navarre, their lance-heads glittering in front, their mailed stature crouched, their limbs compressed, and their long plumes streaming in the air. A crash and a jarring, as though a city's gates were burst, struck an awe throughout the field; it was echoed by a sudden burst of voices from the phalanx of hardy warriors, who shouted and screamed the confused battle-cries of their cantons, as they reeled back, and swayed to and fro, from the onset of the chivalry. But their *chevaux de frize* of halberds was unbroken. Though the steel-clad heads of the horses dashed against the projecting defence; and the Swiss reeled like drunken men, yet, like heroes and men of might, they recovered their ground, with an impetus from their comrades in the rear. In vain did the baffled knights cover their horses' flanks with blood; in vain did they essay with their lances to break through the airy superstructure, or spill the heart's blood of the brave halberdiers, whose length of weapon kept them at bay, and who replied to their efforts with shouts of derision.

Nor was this noble defence lost upon their allies: De Joyeuse and his peers glowed with shame at their own disaster; enthusiasm caught their souls; and they rallied, and returned to the charge, forcing the enemy to quit the unprofitable strife with the Swiss, and meet again their crest-fallen foes.

To restore the confidence of his friends, De Joyeuse advanced the royal standard to the front of his corps of chivalry, and bore down to the aid of the mountaineers; which Navarre and his friends perceiving, withdrew, and retired to prevent their being crushed between two enemies.

When the Catholics had thus, through the obstinacy of the Swiss, recovered their ground, they resolved, by a bold effort, to crown their success. The royal trumpeters sounded a life-stirring strain; and the Duke, standing in his stirrups, cried out—

"*Montjoie St. Denis!* Charge for Valois and *Notre Dame de Louvre!*" And placing his lance in rest, dashed onward, amid the rustling of the harness, and trampling of the steeds of his enthusiastic supporters.

The horses of the Huguenots were too much fatigued to allow them to make a counter charge; they practised the manœuvre of the Swiss, and stood on their guard with extended lances. The contact was terrific; a death-struggle ensued; each man singled out his adversary, to contest for victory or a glorious death.

The standard of the kingdom of Navarre, a red field charged with golden chains, in shape of a cross—or, as Montjoie would have expressed it, *chaînes d'or posées en croix sautoir et l'orle*—was borne by the Baron de Salignac, a brave and honourable noble; but being unseated by a shock from the lance of the Count de Quelus—shame to the Huguenots, and glory to the fastidious knight of the green cuirass!—the standard was caught by a gentleman of Gascony, who, proud of his charge, advanced beyond the shelter of his friends, and was slain by the lance of De Joyeuse, who snatching at the standard, reft it away from the grasp of the falling chevalier, and dashed it, in his rage, beneath his horse's feet, that it might be trampled in the dust.

This disaster threw a damp on the spirits of the Huguenots—they looked upon the misfortune as an omen of defeat—and began to droop, and fight on the defensive, and dispiritedly. They gave ground to the swarming and quickening Catholics. But when Henry beheld the incipient panic, his soul was on fire;—he trembled with emotion. Throwing open his visor, and standing up in his stirrups, with lips quivering convulsively, he addressed his army.—

"Soldiers of Navarre and reformed France!" cried he, waving aloft his lance; "do you want a banner to fight under? Follow my white plume, and turn not your horses' heads till you see it laid in the dust!"

Before the enthusiastic cries of his reviving soldiers could gladden his ear, his charger had borne him into the ranks of the enemy; and his brave knights uttering, with

one heart and voice, the spirit-stirring war-cry of the Bourbons, emulated his noble example, and followed the white plume in its track of victory.

To aid the Huguenot chivalry at this crisis, came the Ritters and arquebusiers, and with their united force they poured upon the Catholics, who were driven upon their brave allies, the Swiss; and what Navarre had not been able to accomplish, was effected by themselves. The mountaineers were forced to give way to the pressure of their friends, and the whole army became a confused heap.

In vain did De Joyeuse attempt to rally, and restore the battle; fortune was against him; his friends were disordered, and heaped about in tumultuous confusion. At this crisis, while the more timid of the Catholics were flying, and the bravest were seeking an honourable death, De Nevailles, who had fought near his liege, found himself in the midst of the flying field. But there was one cavalier who attracted his attention by his seeming disregard of safety; exposing himself singly, like a rock in a mountain-torrent, to the influx of the Huguenots.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Baron, "that armour, and the scarf too! There sits my antagonist, awaiting his dread revenge! Let me see if he recognise my voice"—and as De Nevailles rode toward the solitary horseman, he cried out,—"What ho! Sir Knight of the bend sinister!" in allusion to his scarf; from which decorations, indeed, the heraldic bends are derived.

No sooner did the knight hear the voice, than he clapped spurs to his horse, and rushed to meet the Baron. Both their lances had parted from their owners in the previous conflicts; but their ready swords were sharp enough to decide the fortune of the contest.

"Speak! What name do you shame or honour?" cried De Nevailles in a pause of the conflict. The only reply that the stranger made to this challenge was by a stroke of his weapon; caring less about his own safety than his antagonist's destruction, he aimed a terrific blow at the head of the Baron, which fortunately falling obliquely, as De Nevailles was rising in his stirrups, did him no harm; while the Baron, standing aloft, and gathering all his strength, dealt him a blow which cut through helmet and skull, and penetrating the head, the stunted knight fell dead from his steed.

"*Voilà! bend sinister sable, coupé!*" cried De Nevailles.

The Baron was about to dismount in order to unlace the helmit of his mysterious enemy when the Count De Quelus, who, however, was unknown to De Nevailles—rode up to the victor, and cried in a faint voice,—"Rescue! Rescue! Seigneur! I am the Count De Quelus, and surrender myself prisoner to you—but, help! save the life of the Duke,—he has fallen among villains who will grant him no quarter!"

He pointed with his weapon to a troop of pikemen who were collected at some little distance around a fallen cavalier. De Nevailles immediately forgot his antagonist, and spurred forward to the group, accompanied by De Quelus, but before they had advanced many paces, the latter fell from his steed exhausted, and the Baron arrived at the spot just after the pikemen had departed, carrying with them a richly caparisoned horse, and leaving exposed to his anxious gaze the figure of the wounded leader of the Catholics, lying on the ground in his rich armour,

The Baron, quite overpowered at seeing his old acquaintance of the Louvre in such a plight, dismounted; the tears started to his eyes as he contemplated his forlorn condition; and kneeling down, he removed the helmet from his head, and beheld the pale features of the favourite of Valois in the agonies of death.

"Friend or foe," murmured the dying general, "take off my right hand gauntlet, that I may press to my lips, ere I die, the gift of Margaret, the Dutchess De Joyeuse. Thanks, thanks! he cried faintly, as he pressed the ring to his lips: "bear it to her with my last sigh breathed on its jewel! And take for your trouble, stranger, the rich steel which now encases me, and may it protect you, though it failed De Joyeuse!" Here he paused, overcome with the effort of speaking;—he who had shouted defiance so loudly to the enemy!

"Look up, Monseigneur," cried the Baron;—"It is I, your friend, Villa Franca!—there is hope yet——"

"None, none!" responded the Duke faintly, "I offered the vile Rochellers who beset me, a prince's ransom for my life, but they jeered me with the charge of hanging some of their crew at Noyon: yet I feel happy in dying in the arms of a gentleman. Alas! poor Quelus, where is he?"

"Alive, though much distressed!" replied De Nevailles.

"Thanks!" murmured the Duke, "he tried bad to save me!" And after a few words, in which he implored the Baron to carry the ring to his newly married consort, the illustrious and ill-fated De Joyeuse breathed his last.

When De Nevailles looked up, he saw that the field was nearly deserted of all but stragglers bent on plunder, or soldiers succouring their wounded comrades; and it was not without much difficulty that he obtained assistance to carry the body of the Duke, and his wounded, yet breathing friend, towards the enemy's camp, in which direction the Catholics had retreated, pursued by the victorious Navarre. It much saddened the joy of success in the breast of De Nevailles in reflecting on the untoward fate of the Duke, and the tale of grief which he was charged to deliver to the young bride; and his memory reverted with interest, to the casual remark of Pierre's wife, when she spoke of the marriage and hasty march of De Joyeuse.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The field is heaped with bleeding steeds, and flags, and cloven mail.
HUGUENOT SONG.

THE royal banner and the pennons of De Joyeuse were still streaming from the pavilion; but the interior was crowded with rougher occupants than the stately favourite and his noble companions. There was a confused noise from within. The long table at which the general had feasted, was still in its place, and covered also with viands, but the stools and benches were occupied by our old friends, the German Ritters. The chair of the Duke was filled by one who, at first glance, might have been taken for his herald, placed there perchance for the purpose of derision or insult. But a closer gaze proved the mistake,

for above the tabard of Valois, appeared the long, cunning, humorous face of the valiant Ritter, Herr Hans Schwartz; on his right hand sat Fritz, stupidly drunk, with eyes half closed,—he was habited in a white satin doublet, and on his head was perched a cloth cap, pinched at the corners into an angular form—the ordinary headdress of the mitred clergy. The white doublet contrasted strangely with the sun-burnt face and neck of the wearer, increased by the kerchief which covered a wound on the forehead, imperfectly bound up, so that the blood had escaped, and fallen in blotches over the satin habit. Had his friend in the chair been what his borrowed finery displayed him, he would have pronounced Fritz's coat truly *argent semée gouttée.*

The remainder of the troop exhibited signs equally glaring of good fortune and recklessness; there was not one of the Ritters habited exactly as he appeared in the morning to the muster-call of the Ritt-master. Fritz's neighbour, a bulky Hessian, had taken great pains to equip himself in a state dress of the Duke, but the ermine robe, which should have covered his shoulders, was wrapped closely round a trooper lying on the floor asleep, whose left arm embraced the neck of a silver jug, peeping out from beneath the rich fur. Besides the spoil bedecking their uncouth figures, behind each man lay some costly articles of dress, or utensils of gold and silver. By the singular good fortune which had ever attended the first troop, it obtained the plucking of the pavilion, while the main body of the regiment was still with Navarre in pursuit of the enemy. The bulky Hessian proposed health and good-luck to their comrades with Navarre. After those who had sufficient animation left to hear the toast and drink it had emptied their glasses, Schwartz, throwing himself back in his chair, said very leisurely and seriously, while his fingers were scratching at the golden *fleur-de-lys* of his tabard:—

"I think the colonel does not do us justice:—sometimes he says we are the best troop in the regiment, and the next day, perhaps, he'll tell us we are the worst; but I have not one drop of envy in me, nor shall I blame myself for having drunk your toast, if he give most praise to our comrades who are now with him."

"I dare say not," replied the Hessian. "By all that's

good! I would rather have that shining coat of yours, than his thanks at the head of the regiment."

"We are likely to be sworn at for a week to come for turning our horses' heads this way," cried another trooper, who was trying to keep his eyes open.

"Why, as to that," said Schwartz, filling his glass, "by the holy virgins! Ezzelin and I always judge rightly when and where we are to halt. And I knew at once, just as our preacher knows his book, by merely looking at it, as I should a horse, that we had no business down that lane —Fritz! open your eyes, you drunken wretch!" but the little fellow's head was lying across the heels of the prostrate Ritter in ermine by the time Schwartz had uttered the last word; so, seeing the case hopeless, he continued his address to the other troopers, explaining how he had caught a glimpse of the pavilion over the trees, and his pointing it out to Ezzelin, and their mutual resolve to give up the unprofitable pursuit of the enemy, and turn their attention to the deserted camp.

While Schwartz was discussing this matter to a sleepy audience, Ezzelin, now lieutenant, and in fact, commander of the troop, was in a labyrinth of argument with several Huguenot ministers who followed the army, and who had surprised him and his comrades in an inquisitorial and acquisitional survey of the other section of the pavilion. The case in dispute related to a golden crucifix, and the ecclesiastical garments of a dignitary of the church, who had arrived from Perigueux to pay his respects to the general, and had been accommodated by him with a tent for his sumpter, packages, and retinue, while resting at the camp on his journey to the capital. The reverend seigneur and his servants had scarcely time to save themselves by flight, so little was the defeat of the Catholics expected, before the Ritters entered the camp; and it was, while taking a cursory glance at each tent which stood between them and the pavilion, that the Germans made the discovery of the holy man's domicile, and his packages, containing, among other articles, a crucifix belonging to his see, which they carried with them, and which, it was unanimously agreed, should be divided equally among the whole troop.

But the Huguenot preachers, who hovered about the field of battle as earnestly, though with a better intent, than birds of prey, chanced to enter the pavilion, at a

moment that Ezzelin and the more sober Ritters were amusing themselves with an inspection of the Duke's sleeping chamber, and comparing the weighty crucifix of the bishop with the light ivory relick which the scrupulous and ceremonious leader of the Catholics had erected in his sanctuary. The learned skull-capped Calvinists were excited to a pitch of horror at the idolatrous ware around them; they demanded of Ezzelin and his comrades, that both the gold and the ivory crucifixes, as well as the sacerdotal garments, should be surrendered up to be burned and destroyed, affirming that the very sight, much more the touch, of such profanities, was dangerous to a reformed soldier and Christian. The Ritters answered with loud outcries, but Ezzelin remonstrated with his troopers.

"No, no!" said he, "their reverences are quite right; it would lead us into idolatry!"——

"Right or wrong!" shouted another, interrupting him, "we'll have the"——

"Patience! you wall-eyed brawler," cried Ezzelin, interrupting the speaker in his turn; "I lived five years as man-at-arms in the palace of our good bishop, and have heard many a curious twisted case of conscience decided —and I will now show their reverences how we'll act to their comfort and content. Listen!—This gold crucifix is quite as much an abomination in my eyes, as it is to these holy sirs,—no one who abhors the Pope, and his damnable doctrines, ought to have such a thing"—continued the Ritter, eyeing the costly article with a look of contempt,—"in his possession; and these preachers of the true faith of our holy Luther show a great regard to our souls' good in wishing it to be delivered up to them, that they may remove away for ever from the eyes of all men, this damned papistical bauble!"

The good preachers, four in number, most sanctified looking disciples of Geneva, were seemingly well pleased with this harangue, which was spoken as if the trooper had learned the bishop's mode of delivery, as well as his doctrine of conscience. They continued to listen attentively, not doubting that they should bear away the golden profanity.

From the Ritters, however, arose strong murmurs of disapprobation; but Ezzelin allayed the storm.

"It was a constant sermon in the mouth of my old

master the bishop," said the lieutenant of troopers, "that there was some good in every thing, however bad."

The Huguenot preachers looked at each other in doubt.

"Now that blasphemous cross," said Ezzelin, with the tone of one who is applying an irresistible illustration to his argument, "is very bad, and most heathenish in our eyes:—is it not?"

There was a suppressed growl of dissent.

"But," continued the orator, "honest Heintz, of Strasburg, by putting it into the furnace of his smithy, would quite remove all its ungodliness!"

There was a loud murmur of approbation, and the preachers looked grimly.

"Ay! by the sword of my father," continued Ezzelin, "and show it to us in a state which my old master would call its good side. Now, Ritters! As good Lutherans and free Germans, let us all swear to these holy men, that we will not set eyes on the cross again; but wrap it up carefully till we get back to Strasburg, when Heintz shall turn it into innocent metal."

The murmur, as he finished, rose into a loud shout, and one voice, more witty than godly, cried out,—"Ezzelin, to the rescue!"

"But as for this garment," said the Ritter, holding up the ecclesiastical surplice and rochet, "this Babylonish robe—Pshaw! it smells rankly of the idolatrous mass—fire could not cleanse it—it would contaminate the souls of such ignorant soldiers as ourselves—we freely give it up to these holy men, that they may burn it—do we not, comrades?"

"Away with the clout!" shouted the Ritters, voting away the bishop's relics. Ezzelin then, with a gravity almost heroic, presented the dumbstruck preachers with the robes, which they declined—and slunk away, with hearts full of suppressed anger, from the Pavilion; while the name of the lieutenant echoed through the gorgeous tent, in cries loud enough to wake the slumbering troopers of the banquet-room.

Ezzelin with his detatchment had scarcely left the Pavilion with their prize, and with the intention of removing it to a place of safety, when the Marshal De Vivans, but just returned from the pursuit, and enraged at the relation made by the Hugeunot ministers of the plundering career

of the Ritters, rushed in with several of his friends. All was in confusion. De Vivans claimed the Pavilion and its contents as the acknowledged right of the King of Navarre, as general of the army; while the Ritters, such indeed as were lively enough, swore they would sooner give up their lives than the spoil, Schwartz said he knew not the laws of the French camp, but in his own country, the first comer always drank first, but, in pure good feeling, handed the cup after a draught to his less fortunate comrade; and so in the present instance, they should keep what they had got, and willingly leave the rest to their brave general, the King of Navarre.

But De Vivans swore that his men-at-arms should strip them instantly, and gave orders to that effect; while he himself, and several of the nobles, guarded the entrance till the arrival of his men. Schwartz and his friends, however, awaking their drunken comrades with kicks and blows, the whole corps were in motion, each man grasping as much of the costly plate and garments as he could snatch at, while the more sober stood on their guard with their swords drawn, awaiting the decision of Schwartz, who, after looking about for a moment or two, exclaimed—"We have crossed our noble Rhine-stream, Marshal—and we have crossed your shallow Loire—and would, if we were angry, cross your iron trunks; but we have not the soul to fight against fellow-soldiers! Ritters, to the right! The holy virgins to our rescue!—Follow!"

And so saying, he turned round, and with a blow, cut through the cloth of the Pavilion, and escaped; while his comrades, using their weapons with equal efficacy, followed his example, turning round to ward off a few blows, which the Marshal and his friends intended for them. So ended their exploits of that day.

Never was victory more complete than that of Coutras. Navarre, after pursuing the scattered enemy, and dispersing them beyond the hope of reunion, returned to the camp of the Catholics, and indulged his brave army with the sacking of the encampment, reserving for himself what the Ritters had spared of the Pavilion of De Joyeuse, where he slept that night.

"Another day's rest," said the King to his officers, the morning subsequent to the victoy, "and we'll march to the German camp beyond the Loire! And from that moment, Paris itself is in our power!"

No despicable gleanings are to be picked up on a field of battle, if the gleaners be humble-minded and industrious; rich armour—gold coin—bright weapons—and here and there a wounded man of rank, whose ransom may be worth the trouble of healing his wounds—are to be found. And of these matters, none were so well persuaded as the Ritters, and so rightly inclined to the task.

The Albanians, whose object in leaving the arena of contest was the plunder of the Huguenots' camp, were sadly disappointed in their expectations; they did not reap one tithe of the spoil which fell to the Ritters' share from the gleaning of the field, on the day subsequent to the victory; and after stealing what was available at Coutras, and swearing at their bad luck, they escaped by a route leading to Tours.

On the evening previous to the march of Navarre for for the banks of the Loire, Ezzelin introduced himself into the presence of the Baron De Nevailles, his face big with a tale of wonder. He began to relate, that while Fritz was stripping off the armour of one slain in the fight, the little trooper, of a sudden, uttered a loud cry, and fell on his knees; and his face became so pale, and changed from its ordinary expression, that his comrades, who were busy harvesting close at hand, thought he was about to die.

"And punish him rightly," said De Nevailles; "both he and your comrades have taken as much as would provide pay and rations for the whole army for a month to come."

"Monsiegneur has charged with us," replied Ezzelin, drily; "we did not touch the iron chest which held the great Duke's money—we knew that to be the right of his Majesty. But to-day we have been on the field to look after our poor comrades, and give them Christian burial."

"So you expected your dead comrades had crept into the corselets of nobles!" said the Baron interrupting him.

"Not exactly," rejoined the trooper, "but Fritz was curious, and was punished for it. When we ran up to him, we saw the body of the lieutenant, son of old Von Freiberg!"

"Son of Baron Von Freiberg!" exclaimed De Nevailles, starting with surprise; "he is dead—I mean he died before—no, that could not be—it is a mystery."

"And what is worse," continued Ezzelin, "he must

have fought against us. He wore a black scarf; while all the gentlemen of our army, as Monseigneur knows, displayed a white scarf, as a token of their party. We buried him, however."

"You are certain of that, I hope," cried the Baron, "or he may visit us again."

De Nevailles could scarcely sleep that night, but lay pondering on his strange rencontre with the young student—for such he now felt assured was the cavalier of the black scarf, or knight of the bend sinister. But what gave him most uneasiness in the unexpected reappearance of the lieutenant, was his connexion with the fate of Emilie. That Freiberg had fallen, stunned and insensible, he could not doubt; but he might have revived in time to wreak his vengeance on her and her protector! The thought was madness;—it added bitterness and an apprehension of evil to the memory of their last interview—her figure was ever present to his mind, surrounded with dangers; nor could he dissipate the images which his own imagination had created.

With a foreboding of evil and a sense of depression, to which his confident and aspiring mind had hitherto been a stranger, he arose, amid the clanging of trumpets and the loud note of preparation, to commence a rapid march to the banks of that river, which he had crossed with so much difficulty and glory.

The main body of the army had reached Limoges, when De Vivans, whom Navarre had ordered to push forward with a regiment of arquebusiers, to disperse a strong corps of Swiss still in arms, returned with news of the most alarming and disastrous character. It was to the effect, that the Germans with Casimir and D'Alençon had been completely routed; that Guise, under cover of the night, had attacked and set fire to their encampment at Auneau pouring a most destructive fire upon the affrighted soldiers as they rushed from the flames. A panic ensued;—the efforts of Casimir and the French Prince were alike useless in attempting to restore confidence; they had scarcely time to save themselves by flight from the fangs of the Protector, who found himself, ere morning, victor over that immense but irregular armament, which threatened to do so much, and had performed so little.

Navarre was unwilling to believe intelligence so fatal to his hopes, the fortunes, and the security of his brave army,

but every day brought stronger confirmation of its truth. Casimir, it was said, had escaped back to Germany, while D'Alençon had retired to his castle at Chateau Thierry, broken hearted at his disappointment and ruin.

In this dilemma, the King held a consultation with his officers and nobles, at which they came to the resolution, that it was both dangerous and useless to advance farther, and incur the risk of being circumvented, either by the Protector, or the forces of Valois under the Duke D'Espernon at Orleans. And as October was nearly past, and winter approaching, which would render the roads impracticable, Navarre dismissed the noblesse to their own homes, receiving from each a promise to join his standard in the spring of the next year. The remainder of the army he quartered in the towns possessed by the Huguenots, retaining only a division of two thousand mounted arquebusiers, with which he traversed the provinces under his care, succouring his friends from the irruptions of the Catholics, who continued the warfare on a petty scale throughout the winter.

Thus ended, at one fell swoop, the high-built hopes of the Huguenots and their princely leader, whose sorrow was augmented by the death, either through poison or grief, of his eccentric and fanciful friend D'Alençon, who died at Chateau Thierry, where he had fled for refuge.

De Nevailles, who found the cares and vicissitudes of life cling closer to him than he desired—who reproached himself for the folly of suffering his heart to become attached to any being, whose good or ill fortune, whose smile or frown had power to affect his own happiness, not merely momentarily but enduringly—who yet adored the quiet beauty whose uncertain fate was the cause of his pain;—who adored her, though if his fancy had been previously questioned, it would have selected one after his own character, as D'Usez and her compeeresses—was now destined to perform an office which he would willingly have transferred to another, and which brought sensibly to his mind the depths of his own inquietude.

With a safe-conduct from the Catholics, we must leave him on his journey to Saumur, where the Dutchess De Joyeuse had resided since her parting with her lord, and where she was destined to receive his last words from the mouth of De Nevailles,

CHAPTER XXIV.

Be ruled by me, and we will take the realm;
In any case take heed of childish fear,
For now we hold the she-wolf by the ears,
That if she slip will seize upon us both,
And gripe the sorer, being gript herself.

OLD PLAY.

DURING the winter following the important events just narrated, Catherine was busily engaged in availing herself of the errors of her enemies, and repairing the disasters of her friends and military chiefs. But her task was difficult, and its success uncertain; for her policy was contingent on each succeeding wave of contention, and changed, like the vane, with every wind that blew over the political hemisphere. Yet was she true to her own cause, and tacked and retacked, so as to avail herself of the most opposite currents, in guiding the vessel freighted with the fortunes of herself and the dynasty of Valois, through an ocean where a less skilfully conducted bark would have foundered.

Navarre was, for a time at least, politically extinguished, but his enemy and her own was more powerful than ever; the sun of his destiny was increasing in splendour; the victory achieved over the Germans gave him possession of a fourth part of the kingdom, and he ruled in the provinces subject to his control like a sovereign prince—and, more fortunate than Catherine, retained the affections not only of the Burgundians, but also of those subjects over whom she exercised an ill-obeyed sway.

But the active spirits of her enemies were gradually bringing on a crisis, which threatened to decide at once the question between legitimacy and rebellion; between the priesthood with their protector, and Valois and the friends of his rule. The Duchess of Montpensier, with her esquire and secretary the Chevalier d'Aumale, had been unceasing in their endeavours to discipline the citizens into subordination and obedience to the League; and in this matter they succeeded to their hearts' content.

In the beginning of May, the duchess determined to submit no longer to a delay which chafed her soul with unsatisfied

longings, and rendered it an arena, where the passions struggled with each petty obstacle which prudence suggested to the fears of her counsellors, to which her ardent spirit was forced to submit.

At a meeting of the council of Sixteen, assisted by the nobles of the League at that time resident in Paris, it was resolved that the Duke of Guise should be invited to return, with a solemn promise on the part of the leaguers that they would adopt instant hostilities, nor cease in their warlike efforts till the protector was firmly seated on the throne.

This invitation, like every other proceeding of the League, was reported to Catherine by the diligent Poulain, who throve silently and grew rich in his ambiguous and dangerous station. Scarcely had Guise promised to comply with the wishes of the citizens, and begun his preparations for starting, when an order reached the Château de Guise, desiring him to remain in his present quarters. Obedience was refused to the mandate; and a second and third order met with the same treatment.

As the Louvre was not in a condition to stand a siege against enraged and disciplined citizens, and the troops on which Catherine relied for protection were not yet returned from putting down a hostile demonstration of the Huguenots in the provinces bordering the Loire, she was fain to allow the alternative of the protector's entry into the capital, where he arrived like a second king, and was attended to his hotel in the *Rue St. Antoine* by an innumerable body-guard of the Parisian populace.

Aware of her brother's caution, Montpensier had fixed the day of rising previous to his arrival. On that eventful morn Poulain was waiting at the Hotel de Guise, in a room adjoining the closet of the protector, when his attention was arrested by the sound of a voice engaged in earnest conversation with the duke.

The door at length opened, and displayed the protector accompanied by the renowned Le Clerc Bussi, Governor of the Bastile. Poulain affected no surprise at his unexpected presence, though he had never more need of the impenetrable mask which nature had bestowed on him.

"The Bastile is lost!" said the spy to himself.

His defection proved that an adventurer, however clever, should be suffered to work only in harness, and never allowed to hold a possession by which he might sell his master and ruin his cause.

"You see, Nicholas," said the duke, when his new friend

was gone, "that if any of the good people of the Louvre should fly from the palace to the Bastile, they will meet with rare hospitality. I advised him to have his towers prepared for their reception—but now to business, for this will be a busy day with us all! Have you learned whether Valois's soldiers will reach Paris this morning?"

"My fellows have just returned from the Orleans road," replied Poulain, "and they could see nothing of them. I do not think they can arrive till the evening, unless they had orders to march all night."

"'Tis well!" rejoined the protector; "I must now give directions for our civic movement—you may attend on the council."

But Poulain, who had prepared his mistress for the coming tumult, and advised her to send a messenger to meet the troops and hasten their arrival, now hurried off to the Louvre to warn her of the treachery of Le Clerc, too late, indeed, to deprive him of his command, but timely enough to save the threatened mischief.

On his way thither he heard the noise of a multitude of voices, accompanied with repeated discharges of arquebuses; the sounds grew nearer and nearer, but the performers of this discordant music were not as yet within sight, being hidden by an angle of the street.

"Now, Nicholas!" said Poulain to himself; "you have walked these streets to some purpose—and have put much gold in your pocket—and talked with many great people who call you friend, and listen to your advice! You are a lieutenant of police—and Le Clerc is governor of the Bastile—what has prevented you from following his example? Could I not have put both mother and son into the duchess's hands long ago? Assuredly! And gained the patent of dukedom from King Henry of Lorraine? Yes! for my bargain would be worth the price! What a lucky thing it is for the cause of good order in Europe, that my father would not let me trade with my uncle in the Levant, because I was affirmed to be void of knavery, and but a stupid, honest, sheep-faced boy! Not a convent would take me in—I did not look knave enough to wear a bald head and a coarse robe, to cover an intriguing heart! But they have lost their best man—I should have beaten Lincestre hollow, except in preaching, for which I have not the voice. And so my father obtained for me a municipal station as a certainty, quite assured that I was too stupid to gain a crown in any work of chance or skill, where profit depends on foresight

and sagacity! And how has it turned out? I could purchase the worth of all my family, even to fourth cousins? And yet I am tolerably honest—at least faithful! But here come some of the greatest rogues under the sun!"

At this moment the procession turned the corner, and the spy beheld a corps of armed monks, pacing the rounds of the city, to excite the ardour of the citizens. First of the ecclesiastical army, came the Bishop of Senlis in his rochet, holding a pike in one hand, and a crosier in the other. After the bishop marched a crowd of Cordeliers, Dominicans, monks of Chatreux, Capuchins, Minimes, Carmelites, and other orders, armed in such grotesque style that the spy, though bowing in reverence, and receiving many gracious nods in return, as a worthy colleague, was forced to keep his lips pressed close, lest a smile of derision should play over them.

First, his eye caught a demure Capuchin, with a head bowed down with the unusual weight of iron, and a long beard brushing his glittering cuirass, and carrying a stout pike instead of staff, to aid his sandalled feet in the support of the body; next came a Cordelier, in gray cloak and hood and corded waist, bearing on his shoulder a two-handed sword, large enough for Goliah or a knight of Charlemagne. Two Minimes followed, over-bulky for cuirasses, but each holding in his hand an arquebuse with lighted matchcord; this couple showed, by their looks of suppressed cunning, a laughable contrast with the earnest and serious demeanour of the Capuchins. Following the Minimes was a crowd of many hundred monks, carrying arms, both offensive and defensive—adopted apparently at hap-hazard, as though they had ransacked the arsenal and bedecked themselves with its contents.

Among these were some as jovial and goodly-looking as Roquelaure—others quite sad and melancholy—many, especially those unincumbered with defensive armour, laughing at their burdened and weaker brethren, whose faces were dissolved in perspiration. The sagacious spy remarked that the lean, bearded, melancholy Capuchins were the most heavily armed, and, in general, carried their load as a culprit would his gallows, while the gleeful, smiling Feuillans and Cordeliers rejoiced in the simple burden of an arquebuse, and had strength enough to spare for a laugh at their friends. Two monks particularly caught his attention. One, a Cordelier, a short but robust man, with bright eyes, and large wrinkles about his mouth, which Nicholas set down as the wear and tear of incessant laughter. The whole pageant appeared to his jovial

reverence worthy of the broadest grin; but being unwilling to express himself so openly, it escaped in chuckles, which he hung down his head to conceal. He carried a large sword, similar to the one we have just described; and whether accidentally or maliciously on his part, the handle protruded at least two feet in front, and ever and anon butted against the back of an aged Capuchin.

The other monk was a little Feuillant dressed in white, with a black scapulary hanging down to his heels, his head half concealed in a cloth hood or cap, whose long tail fell down his back as low as the girdle. He hallooed, and shouted, and jumped about, with an arquebuse in his hand, as though he were mad, to the great delight of the citizens who witnessed the spectacle;—every one knew *le petit Feuillant Boiteux*, as he was called by the populace—though Montpensier designated him marshal of the field of the holy orders. Upon seeing Poulain he flew out of the ranks, and running up to the spy, cried—

"Ah, my good Nicholas! you shall see how bravely we'll charge the Swiss!"

"I am sure of it," replied Poulain; "they tell me you have been practising with ball at the convent pump! Is that true, Father Bernard?"

"You shall see!" replied the eccentric little fellow. He stopped, fastened the lighted match to the lock, and holding the piece as far from his body as the length of his arms would allow, turned back his face, pale with fear, and with a trembling hand pulled the trigger. The discharge so frightened his reverence that the arquebuse fell from his grasp, and the crowd set up a loud shout, crying, "*Bravo! Père Bernard! Bravo! mon petit Feuillant!*" Father Bernard picked up the arquebuse, and rejoined the ranks very complacently, amid the plaudits of the people.

After the monks marched a troop of horsemen, surrounding a holy father, also mounted, bearing a banner charged with the effigies of St. Michael overcoming the dragon. This was the ensign of the holy division. In the rear was an immense number of citizens, boys, and women.

"Well!" exclaimed Poulain to himself; "the Louvre can at least hold out against this corps till the arrival of the troops!"

But ere the diligent spy reached the palace he encountered the formidable La Chapelle Martel, who informed him that the king's troops were already at the barrier of St. Antoine, but that before they gained the Louvre, the old Parisian chains and bar-

ricades should enclose them, like so many fish in a net, on all sides.

"What next?" said Poulain to himself, when he had parted with the merchant;—"I gather news as I run along like a snow-ball increasing in size—but I must hasten—I hear the beat of the drum—our soldiers have entered the city."

At this momentous crisis, when the thundering war-chariots of contention were rushing into each other's course, threatening concussion and death, Catherine was engaged with Valois and his counsellors, awaiting, with her usual policy, for an advantageous opening to strike a deadly blow at her inveterate enemies. With or without troops, she had deemed it madness to oppose the entrance of Guise, as the whole city was against her, and the authority of her son hung upon a thread as slender as the gossamer. Paris had thrown itself at the feet of the Protector of the League; the hour was his own—"But let us see how long he will keep it!" exclaimed the queen-mother to her friends.

As they sat in consultation the report of fire-arms was heard, mingled with cries and shouts as of a tumult in the distance. De Biron entered the council-room, and informed her majesty that a faithful servant had brought intelligence that the division under the command of Monsieur d'O, which had but just entered the barriers, was attacked by armed citizens, who had barricaded the streets with chains, and were already an overmatch for the soldiers.

"Let Grillon lead out the Swiss to their aid!" cried the queen, "and give orders to Monsieur Le Clerc at the Bastile, and the officer in command of the arsenal, to point their cannon where it may best serve us!"

"Le Clerc," replied the marshal, "holds the Bastile for the Duke of Guise!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Catherine, starting, while the council looked at each other bewildered at this unexpected defection. "But," continued she, resuming her seat with composure, after a moment's pause:—"there is yet a weak corner in the heart of Guise,—there will I make a lodgment!"

De Biron retired to execute her orders. The Swiss soon turned out, but the noise of the firing became quicker and louder, intimating the approximation of the combat to the Louvre. Villeroi, who had ever counselled peace with Guise and the extermination of the Huguenots, now spoke to the same effect.

"Your majesty's servants," said he, "have not to fight

merely with the infatuated burgesses of the city, but with the Church—his Holiness—the Duke of Guise, whose hotel is at this moment the rendezvous for the noblesse of every province in France—and so supported, he will himself assault the palace."

"I never doubt the correctness of your information, secretary," said Catherine, with a sneer; "for its source is undoubted."

"The suspicion is unjust!" exclaimed Villeroi, turning towards Valois, who was seated in his chair, earnestly listening to the argument.

"Your majesty and our most gracious liege," said D'Espernon, "cannot be in danger in the Louvre, surrounded by such generals as the Marshals de Biron and De Cosse—and your faithful court—and your tried guards—yet—"

But ere the duke could utter another word, his voice was drowned in a cry from without, like the noise of an earthquake, which seemed to shake the massy pile to its foundations. The king started from his seat, and snatched his sword from the table where it lay—all seemed alarmed save the queen, who mastered her feelings.

"You hear, messeigneurs," said she, in a sarcastic tone, "the antithesis to our cousin D'Espernon's incomplete averment—may we ask you to proceed to the next point, monseigneur?"

But that cry had driven out all the forms of logic from the mind of the gallant duke; it awoke in him the chivalric spirit of his country, and he exclaimed—

"No time now for arguments, my liege. They are burnt up within me—and may the factious Guise be within hearing of our only rhetoric—*Montjoie St. Denis! et Notre Dame de Louvre!*"

"And here comes Montjoie in good time to echo our cousin's words!" cried the king, attempting a laugh, as he resumed his chair of state and threw by his sword.

The chief herald, accompanied by his coadjutors, advanced to the chair, and informed his majesty that Father Lincestre, a deputy from the burgesses and ecclesiastics before the Louvre, awaited admittance to his presence.

A short conference ensued between Villeroi and their majesties, who were resolved to maintain the etiquette of the court in every predicament.

"The king," said the secretary, turning to Montjoie, "cannot acknowledge burgesses and ecclesiastics assembled trea-

sonably; but that he may yet listen to his misled subjects, his majesty permits the approach of Father Lincestre, who has had that honour heretofore."

With this answer the heralds retired.

De Biron, who had been parleying with the populace, received from Montjoie the royal reply to the leaguers. But though the curled lip and the bitter expressions of ridicule which escaped from him while reconnoitring the rabble army, evinced as much scorn and contempt for his opponents as filled the royal breast of Catherine, yet prudence and military knowledge alike pointed out the weakness of his position, and the necessity of a compromise. The Swiss, who had turned out to assist the progress of Monsieur d'O, were already entrapped and disarmed by the citizens, and their weapons distributed among the victors.

The *Quai de Bourbon, the Rue des Poulies*, and every approach to the palace save on the side of the Tuileries, were choked up with armed citizens and monks, whose cries rent the air with one accord for the destruction of Valois and his favourites. To their united strength the marshal could only oppose a weak defence; and were they disposed to force the palace, he could not hold out one hour, though the soldiers were to slay quintuple their own number in resisting the assault. That they would proceed to this extremity the marshal had no doubt, as Poulain had so informed him; and moreover, that Guise intended remaining at his hotel apparently estranged from the faction, though secretly directing its movements.

Such being the condition of affairs, De Biron was anxious that the queen should know as much as himself, lest a throne, and what was even more precious, might be lost for the sake of a punctilio. Before Lincestre was admitted, he determined as a matter of duty to explain to the royal council the danger they ran, which her majesty's policy of purposely omitting to concentre the troops at her disposal around the throne,—had augmented even to a certainty of destruction. Though it was expected that the detachment now in the city would reach the Louvre in safety, yet the marshal could, had it been the wishes of the queen, have drawn a considerable army to the capital long previous to the crisis. But such was not her policy, which was of a subtler and less obvious nature; and as De Biron rightly thought, inconsistent with those nice distinctions of etiquette, such as had characterized the reply borne by Montjoie, and dictated, as he imagined, in ignorance of

the number of the besieging army, and its victory over the Swiss.

But the marshal found, on making his report, that even on this point the queen had contrived to serve both her pride and policy with due honour; she was anxious to make the League believe that the old spirit of the dynasty—one which has ever characterized the possessors of the French throne, would influence Valois rather to lose his crown than submit to a breach of etiquette.

"Let them but firmly believe our folly, marshal," cried the queen, with animation, "we shall be allowed to flutter a little on the notion of our observances; and when they imagine us wrapped up in them to our destruction, like a sinking man in a heavy garment, away flies etiquette, leaving us as free as a hawk springing from the falconer's hand."

At this moment the herald announced Father Lincestre, who entered the chamber with more trepidation than that renowned preacher was wont to display in the presence of princes. He commenced by begging their majesties to remember that he was but a messenger from the citizens, and anxious to preserve the public peace; and he hoped that the sacredness of his order would preserve him from injury. Saying this, he was about to walk up to the royal chair, when a noble threw himself between, and Valois instinctively caught hold of his sword. Lincestre paused, and took out a paper from his bosom, which he gave to the other; those who looked closely remarked a smile on his lip.

"We hope that all your brethren are equally moderate," said Catherine, surveying him earnestly, "for we intend walking in penance to Notre Dame."

The preacher evidently understood the allusion; he bowed profoundly, and with an air of humility and calmness of demeanour, yet his eyes rested anywhere but on the person of her majesty.

"Montjoie, read this!" said the king, handing the document to the herald. Montjoie began to read:—

"La Chapelle Martel, Jean le Clerc Bussi—"

"Le Clerc Bussi! Who is he, Montjoie?" exclaimed Valois, with stifled rage.

"I am not more learned than your majesty in this instance," replied the king-at-arms, happily catching the temper of Valois, "though professing acquaintance with the alliances of every family in France; but there are two stems of the ancient tree of Bussi in—"

"Read on, Montjoie!" said Catherine.

The herald continued:—

"Jean Le Clerc Bussi, Governor of the Bastile—"

"Our own servant!" exclaimed Valois, with affected surprise and real anger.

"What is he doing among ye?" said Catherine, addressing the preacher.

"He wishes to mediate," replied Lincestre.

"And teaches, meanwhile, monks and butchers the use of the rapier, we imagine," rejoined the queen, bitterly.

The herald continued to read to the conclusion of the scroll. It was a declaration of the provosts and chief citizens, members of the League and heads of the monastic orders, and the *curés* and preachers of the city, to the effect that Henry of Valois was unfit to govern the kingdom of France,—with a demand that he would transfer the executive power to the Duke of Guise, constituting him regent during the life of the king, and successor to the throne. It finished with a remonstrance from the citizens on account of the troops having fired on the people; and a threat, that unless the gate of the Louvre were surrendered to the leaguers in one hour's time from the presentation of the declaration, the palace would be forced, and for the consequences which would ensue the chiefs could not hold themselves responsible.

"Father Lincestre may wait in the ante-chamber for our reply!" exclaimed Catherine, when the herald had finished reading this insolent cartel. The preacher bowed, and retired.

"It was contrary to our wishes, marshal," said the queen, "that the troops should fire on the rabble!"

"It was in self-defence only," replied De Biron, "and has proved unavailing."

A consultation ensued among the council, in which her majesty took but little part. At length she started up, and desired the preacher to be recalled. She asked him if the League would allow her to pass to the church of St. Paul and return ere they stormed the palace; that she would not consume more time than was occupied in her usual prayers; that after an appeal to Heaven, she should feel more resigned to her fate, whatever that might be.

Lincestre said, that as the piety of her majesty was proverbial, he had but little doubt of their compliance, and he promised to return instantly with an answer to the request. The gates were closed upon the preacher, who was received with acclamations of respect by the besieging army, which consisted of

a numberless multitude of all ranks, irregularly armed, few possessing a military appearance, though an armoury might have been completed by selection, to say nothing of the instruments of trade, such as butchers' knives, smiths' hammers, and even beggars' staves.

The chiefs of the League conferred with each other on the demand .The general feeling was, to grant her majesty a safe-conduct and to wait till her return from the church; not out of kindness, but they judged from one side of her character, which was well known, that she expected a miracle in her favour, and would be, as La Chapelle expressed himself, as obstinate as a pig after her appeal to Heaven; consequently they should have the sacking of the Louvre in addition to the capture of the monarch. This was a temptation too strong to be resisted.

"If I thought any of the saints would listen to her," said La Chapelle Martel, "the only hour that she has to reign should be spent where she is now—but Heaven is on our side, holy father, as you have said to us often."

"It would be a want of courtesy to refuse her," said Bussi le Clerc.

"So you thought when you lent two thousand crowns to that imp and heretic D'Alençon," rejoined La Chapelle, with a sneer.

But a new difficulty now arose; the queen wished to proceed to the church in her coach, but the leaguers declared it impracticable, as every street was barricaded, and the barriers could not be removed till Valois was deposed. However, she sent word to these worthies that she would go in her chair, which was presently seen issuing from the gates, attended only by the usher Davila. Le Clerc crept out of the way amid the laughter of his friends; but La Chapelle and Lincestre escorted her majesty through the dense crowd of citizen-soldiers, each of whom had a remark to make, or a jest to break on the unfortunate ear of royalty.

When she had cleared the crowd her ushers extraordinary retired, leaving her to the care of the captains of the successive barricades, which were opened on her approach, and immediately fastened again after the passage of the sedan. So much time was spent in the operation, and so little progress made, that even the usher could not avoid an exclamation of anger.

"Tush! tush! Davila," said Catherine, bending towards him, "these delays are golden moments to me. I wish the brutes were constrained to break the chains at every post. The sun of Guise is on the ascendant, but the day is not

yet over—you shall see the lilies reflect its beams ere sunset."

In this mode passed the queen through the midst of her enemies, concealing her fears, or perhaps fearless, for her nature, though polished and refined by culture, was as hard as steel, and as elastic.

"Will your majesty," said Davila, "have the attendance of father"—"Guise? Yes, carry me to his hotel—I will pray to him alone!" exclaimed Catherine to the astonished usher. So instead of going to the Church of St. Paul in the *Rue St. Antoine*, her sedan stopped at the door of the Hotel de Guise in the same street. She sent Davila to announce her arrival to the Protector of the League.

The queen remained in the chair. Placing her hands together in the attitude of prayer, she exclaimed:—"May Heaven prosper our plans! and thou, O holy Virgin, and our ever-honoured St. Michael! intercede with the dread Holy Ghost, for whose glory my pious son has erected the noblest institution in Christendom with a hundred knights of the noblest birth—that my beloved Henry, the last of my sons, may keep and follow the counsel I have given him, and vanquish his enemies through thy aid."

Whether through superstition or a reaction of her fancy, she felt her mind quieted of its apprehensions for her son's future course of action. She drew aside the curtain, and surveyed the palace of his great enemy.

"That is his abode," exclaimed the queen, soliloquizing:—"how calm the fiend is in his den! how innocent of rebellion those walls look—but let me enter—my pilgrimage is here at an end! My poor François would have crushed the wretch, but he has left the work for his mother!—Peace be with him."

Davila at this moment returned to conduct her to the presence of Guise, who was engaged talking with his friends in a hall, lit by a window looking into a small garden. He seemed perplexed and astonished at the unexpected visit, but Catherine, calm and unruffled in her manner, requested an interview. He would not, however, leave the hall, but led her aside near the window, where they were out of hearing of his friends.

To the spectators, the contest that ensued between the two subtlest spirits of France seemed not of the gentlest nature. Nor was it prudent of her to appear fawning. She reproached the duke for bringing on the present dangerous crisis, and made use of strong invectives in her anger, which caused him to

answer sometimes in explosive bursts of passion, and often by satirical laughter. She hinted that she had much to say, but that the time was pressing, on account of the threats of the leaguers, who could scarcely be induced to wait till her return. Guise replied that he had no command over them; but the queen, pointing to the piles of arms which she had noticed in the garden, asked him for what purpose they were to be applied.

"For self-defence," replied the duke, who was taken by surprise.

"Well," exclaimed Catherine, "at least send to the leaguers, and request a cessation of hostilities till I return—you have certainly influence enough for that—Montpensier, your sister, I know would not do this kindness, for we women hate each other—but with your sex we have no petty jealousies."

The duke, who had forgotten his garden armoury, and been taken unawares by the sharp-sighted queen, out of a feeling of chivalric honour, believing himself vanquished in his argument, acceded to her request.

She next spoke of the protector's ambitious and disloyal designs on her son's throne, which she did not attempt to repel with violence, but rather spoke like one who was driving a bargain, to retain as much as possible out of the forfeited regalia. While pleading hard for the Duchy of Bretagne or Burgundy, as a provision for the remaining members of her family, a gentleman rushed into the hall in great alarm. The new-comer, looking around for the duke, dragged him away from the queen, and communicated something in a suppressed but very earnest tone.

Catherine was calm and motionless, repressing the smile which strove to move her lips.

The effect of the news on the duke was sudden. For a moment he turned pale, looked affrighted and aghast; but on meeting the calm gaze of Catherine, his features became convulsed with a dreadful expression of anger; his eyes flashing fire. Had his antagonist been of the other sex, that moment would have been her last! He attempted to speak, but articulation failed him, and he burst into an hysterical laugh like a madman; but on recovering a little the possession of his faculties, he said to Catherine, in a hollow voice—

"Madame! you have deceived us! The king has escaped me!"

"Escaped you, cousin?" cried the queen, softly, as though

she were replying to the remark of one beloved. "Then the brave army on the *Quai de Bourbon* really owns your sway?"

"By my noble father's spirit!" exclaimed the enraged duke, "which was sacrificed for the interests of your accursed family—do not tempt me too far! Be satisfied with the fruits of your Satanic subtlety—but!—may it cause you to wallow in the dust like the serpent, whose type you are! I *have* influence over the good Catholics of this city and of France—it is well for you, madame, that I have!—Hear you those cries in the street? they come from the hearts of disappointed and outraged citizens! Walk forth, noble lady, into the midst of your subjects! Show yourself to their loving eyes in that plain robe of matronly sanctity—the only garment that ever sees the outside of your heretical, licentious abode—ay! bid your usher ask of the shouting crowd a passage for the Queen of France—and let him say, that the Protector of the holy League of religion does not detain her!"

When the duke had finished this harangue, the fruits of a bitter and baffled soul, he strode out of the hall, followed by many of his gentlemen.

"Ah, Davila!" said the queen, addressing her usher, "how men flounder about when they have lost their footing! But learn the cause of that shouting. My poor chair will surely fall a sacrifice to the anger of those who may, in their love for the Guise, care but little for their sovereign's convenience."

The usher soon returned with the information, that the space in front of the hotel was crowded with the motley army of the League, who were calling aloud for the Duke of Guise to appear. The chair was, however, safe at the hall door.

"Well, there is always something to be thankful to Heaven for in the worst of times!" exclaimed the now buoyant *Notre Dame de Louvre*.

The duke had spoken very truly when he said that it was well for her majesty that he had influence over the people; for, mingled with their loud acclamations of praise of their illustrious chief, were heard denunciations against the queen.

At length, after a long interval—partly spent in consultation with his brother, the Cardinal Guise, the Cardinal du Perron, a learned man, who really adorned the low-crowned hat, and was friendly to peace and good order, the marshal, Count Brissac, and many others—the protector appeared on the steps of the hotel, and received the greetings of the multitude.

The tact which had ever distinguished the duke in the adap-

tation of his demeanour and bearing to the station of a people's idol, was now signally displayed in no less a matter than in the readiness with which he had changed his dress for one more conspicuous. He was habited in a nether garment and doublet of crimson satin; a cloak of black velvet, and bonnet of the same material and colour, with a waving plume of red feathers. At the door stood the duke's horse, a fine black genet, called the Moor, upon which he mounted and rode slowly towards the Louvre, followed by his friends on foot. In his train was seen the chair of Catherine; but the curtains were drawn close, and the people could only vent their indignation in groans and shouts of vengeance, without the satisfaction of seeing their victim beneath the torture of their cries.

Guise, now at the height of popularity—his progress like the triumph of a Roman conqueror—captive royalty in his train—his friends, the noblest of the land, honouring him with their retinue—the windows crowded with fair partisans, who waved their kerchiefs in gratulation—the streets choked with sturdier leaguers, prepared to carry him to supreme power by the strength of their weapons—the air rent with shouts as he passed onward, bowing to the ladies, whose presence and joyous welcomings graced his triumph—rode over the prostrate barriers with no other obstruction than that which arose from the crowded streets and the joy of the inhabitants.

Though Catherine was desirous of remaining unseen—although protected from violence by the gentlemen of the protector's party—yet was she anxious to witness the testimonies of good-will offered to the rival of her son. From the narrow space between the curtains, she looked out on the lively scene, contented with the part she had played.

The costume of the protector had not escaped her notice—she recognised the colours as identical with those worn by his father, Francis of Lorraine, on a similar exploit.

To Davila, the shadow of royalty, she exclaimed, "He swore just now by his father's spirit, and see! the very horse and the very dress his father rode and wore when he came to the Louvre to demand justice of us—or, in plainer language, that we should vacate the judgment-seat! Has this arch-rebel been taught by his friends, the preachers, to expect a hidden virtue in a doublet? His partisans make a loud noise—but our cousin has lost the game he played for—I can well excuse the wordy threats which assail me."

"See how proudly the Moor beats the ground!" cried a

citizen to his friend. "And what a triumph for our noble protector! Yet he looks pale with anxiety: Heaven can alone reward him!"

"Heaven shall alone reward him, if we do not," muttered Catherine, who overheard the speech. "Triumph, forsooth! Does the pale face declare triumph! I have this day fixed a wrinkle on his brow, which not all the fair soft palms which now greet him can rub out!"

When the duke came in sight of his dense army, a cry loud as that which had disturbed the king and his council filled the air. All who owned covering for their heads took them off to wave aloft, and those who had none swung about their weapons. To the eye of fancy it portrayed the destructive effects of a hurricane, while the swelling noise of human voices formed an aerial accompaniment to the agitated mass. But this welcome, which drew forth a bitter sneer from our lady of the Louvre, did not last long; there was something wrong with the leaders of the mob; and they began to group around their chief with the looks of baffled and disappointed men.

The story of the escape was soon told. After the departure of Catherine, Valois had passed unobserved to the gardens of the Tuileries, waited while horses were caparisoned for himself and the friends who accompanied him, and then sallied out at the garden-gate, trusting for escape to the speed and celerity of his movements. An alarm was raised when the horsemen were seen galloping across the fields, and the leaguers gave pursuit, but with what success was not yet known.

The council of Sixteen, their secretary Lincestre, Bussi le Clerc, Father Bernard, and many of his brethren, congregated in a circle to determine what plan should be adopted with respect to the Duke of Guise, who was listening to the narrative of the escape from the lips of La Chapelle Martel. *Le Petit Feuillant Boiteux*, who gesticulated with arquebuse in hand, would hear of nothing less than the immediate elevation of the duke to the throne; and so fixed was he on this point, that he turned to the mob and bade them proclaim aloud their attachment to the new monarch. *Vive Henri de Lorraine!* burst from his lips as he whirled the arquebuse over his head, to the great danger of the leaguers, who were obliged to describe a circle for his gyrations.

In this matter he had been tutored by the Duchess of Montpensier, now waiting anxiously at home to hear of the proclamation of her brother—who had only been prevented by his

earnest entreaties from being present, lest a meeting with her fallen rival Catherine should be attended with consequences which he would rather should not take place, notwithstanding his hatred of the queen-mother.

The gladdening cry of Father Bernard was caught up and echoed and re-echoed from one end of the dense mass of people to the other; but the council were not prepared for the explosion, and looked at each other for advice, while the duke's Moor grew restive at the tumult, and reared with its noble rider, who being a good horseman, kept his seat with ease, and taking off his cap, waved its red plume in salutation.

"Ah! monseigneur!" exclaimed the shrouded captive; "but the sun is yet far above the horizon—and will shine upon the lilies when the barking of these dogs is silenced!"

Whether the members of the council would have acquiesced in the wishes of the citizens is uncertain, as fear made them pause at the very crisis of their fortune—Valois was still at large; and though the queen-mother was encaged and a captive, yet he might rally, and make head against his enemies. These reflections deterred them from the instant adoption of Father Bernard's proposal; though no doubt can be entertained, that before the assembly dissolved Guise would have received the homage of the city, had not an unexpected accident caused a delay.

Montpensier, who was fretting and chafing herself at the Hotel de Guise, which she had made head-quarters since the return of the duke, determined as soon as he was out of sight to follow immediately, and be present at the downfall of the dynasty of Valois, and the capture or surrender of the Louvre. To accomplish this object without exciting unnecessary attention, she made the Chevalier d'Aumale attend her, and walked to the Louvre with her solitary esquire; but madame was soon recognised, and the citizens imagining that she had come on purpose to make her triumphal entry into the future residence of the illustrious protector, hailed her presence with acclamations of enthusiasm.

The noise had scarcely subsided ere a shout of triumph arose in the distance, followed by the cry of—the king! the king! The council pricked up their ears, and looked like hounds who had recovered scent, while Guise could scarcely repress a smile of heart-felt pleasure at the glad announcement that the game was once more in his hands.

"I have come in time, Henry!" exclaimed Montpensier, ad-

dressing her brother, "but you would have deprived me of this pleasure!"

"It is indeed he!" cried the duke, standing in his stirrups; "he rides between two of our faithful citizens, in profound grief, his face bent over the horse's neck."

"Lift me up, Henry," cried his sister, almost breathless with anxiety;—"let me have but one glance at the wretch."

"Stay but a minute," replied the duke, "and he will be here."

At this instant Bussi le Clerc approached the duchess, bowing with one of his best and most studied attitudes.

"Ah! madame!" cried the governor, "we live again! Our friends were too swift for the heretic."

The utmost joy now prevailed among the hitherto discomfited leaguers, who rejoiced in the recovery of the prize which they had suffered to slip through their fingers. As the cortège approached the spot where Guise and the chiefs of the League were waiting, Le Clerc was congratulated by his confederates on the honour which would fall to his lot in escorting the captive to the prison of the Bastile.

"Let the best dungeon be carefully swept for Brother Henry!" exclaimed the rough vulgar La Chapelle.

"Monsieur Bussi has done that already!" cried Montpensier, who was wild and pleased enough to crack a joke with the meanest of the many thousand patriots who surrounded her.

But the effect of this news on Catherine was alarming to her faithful usher.

"*Mon Dieu!* I am deserted! Heaven has forsaken us!" exclaimed the agonized queen, with bitterness:—"Let me have air and more room, Davila! I am suffocated! Let the people fall back."

But she forgot that but one of the many beings who environed her prison-cage retained a sense of obedience to her authority. She sunk back exhausted. The crafty duchess, who had not forgotten the ballette of "Montpensier at the Louvre," now approached her rival unseen, and placing her head close to the curtain, said in a tone of bitter mockery, "Condé shall dance before me in the old ballette to-night!"

"Ah! What—I am dreaming in mid-day!" exclaimed the queen-mother, roused from a state of stupor by these words, which smote her sense of hearing with an almost supernatural power. The duchess waited for no reply, but glided back to

her brother, who was addressing the guards in charge of the captive. The face of the king was still buried in his cloak, from which he had never once looked up, but sat forlorn and dejected, with limbs almost powerless, and suffered himself to be led wherever his enemies listed. But the triumph of the leaguers did not seem complete unless the monarch beheld his own degradation and the pre-eminence of his foes.

"Let us see your atheist face!" cried the brutal little *Feuillant Boiteux*, striking him on the back with his arquebuse.

At this outrage the captive slowly raised his head from the horse's neck, and disclosed, not the royal features of Valois, but the broad face and stony eyes of his jester Chicot. A cry of disappointment and indignation arose from the spectators, while the jester, sitting upright, rolled his large prominent eyes from side to side, without moving or relaxing a muscle; one would have imagined his head fixed in an invisible vice. Fear cast a ludicrous expression of solemnity over his features—he seemed unable to move a limb—his shoulders were shrunken, and his arms hung immoveable by his sides.

This instinctive terror was not without cause. The monks cried out—"Down with him! Sew him in a sack and throw him over the quay! But the little Feuillant shouted out to the mob—"A tailor! a tailor! We'll stitch him up in his master's cloak of deception!"

Catherine, whose attention was awakened by the loud cry, drew aside the curtain, and beholding Chicot where her fears had placed Valois, cried out—"I thought my son could never be such a *bête!*" scarcely able to repress a triumphant laugh.

Montpensier, who had prepared herself for a visual banquet of revenge, was now dumb with rage, and leaned for support on D'Aumale.

The enraged Feuillant ran up to the shrinking jester, but Guise, whose nature was as lofty as his ambition, interposed his authority, saying Chicot was not to blame for serving his master; but that the two fools who had been either bribed or deceived, were more deserving of the Seine and a sack. They were presently stretched upon the ground, and would have expiated their delusion with death had not the duke again interposed.

"Let us hear what they have to say!" cried the Protector of the League.

One of them told a long story of the pursuit,—of the superior horsemanship of himself and his comrade—of gaining upon the royal fugitive, who escaped with his friends into a

wood—of their search,—and the discovery of the jester, whom they overtook on the opposite side of the wood, vainly striving to escape with his lame steed. He narrated the sobbing and piteous cries of the captive, who buried his face within the cloak, and resigned himself to his sad fate ere they had an opportunity of seeing his features. The man concluded by an appeal to Chicot, whether the cloak which he wore was not the same which had covered the king. Here he looked up to the jester for confirmation of his story—but seemed on a sudden struck with wonder.

And well he might, for Chicot, who had divested himself of his extreme terror through the humanity of Guise, having disengaged his feet from the stirrups, was lying his whole length along the horse's back, his chin dovetailed between the animal's ears, which rose on each side the jester's face, like an enormous pair of whiskers.

With the exception of Montpensier, all were moved to laughter at the quiet absurdity of Chicot; but the duchess was brooding over her disappointed hope; she was not too much blinded by passion to perceive that Valois being free, he might sit in regal state at Orleans or Tours, and hold his parliaments or an assembly of the states at either city—and that Guise had gained only an open unlimited power in the capital, in lieu of the previous underhand sway which he had acquired as a prerogative of his rebellion. These thoughts stimulated her to a bitter revenge on her fallen foes, which was increased by the maddening reflection that the ill-success of the movement was owing to the stupid leniency of her brother and her own supineness in allowing his weaker nature freedom of action. Had she continued to hold the reins of revolt, there would have been no mistake!

A feeling of honour in a heart not insensible to the charities of life, has ever proved a stumbling-block to vaulting ambition; the duke should have dismissed humanity from his breast when he dared aspire to the throne of his rightful lord; but while lamenting his weakness, Montpensier forgot to consider that the natural amiability of her brother had been one principal cause of his popularity; a lesson to those who aspire to rule, showing that the same quality which lifts them to eminence, in the end puts a stop to their career.

Guise also felt himself foiled, and bitterly deplored the generosity of his nature, which had been allowed to exert itself when his heart should have been strung to his fell purpose.

But though baffled, he possessed the power of concealing

his emotions, and smiled upon his friends as though all was tranquil within the sanctuary of his soul. He consoled himself with the reflection that he was still young, and had just learned by heart a wholesome lesson; and that for the future there would exist no necessity for a show of courtesy and an outward respect to the house of Valois; that henceforth open hostility would take the place of intrigue.

But in what position did he stand?—What had he acquired through his own daring and the enthusiasm of the leaguers? These questions passed rapidly through his mind—when accidentally looking towards Montpensier, he beheld her eyes fixed upon his countenance, as though she were waiting the answers to his own self-questioning.

"I must have the Louvre for peace' sake," said the duke to himself; "though I would rather march on towards Orleans, whither, I suppose, Valois has fled."

With this resolve he approached the sedan of the queen-mother, who was quietly awaiting the turn of affairs, and careless of the result now that her son was out of danger. A negotiation ensued. Catherine agreed to deliver up the keys of the city—a nominal surrender for form's sake, as they were already in the hands of the leaguers;—the possession of the Louvre, the arsenal, the Bastile, and every other place and point of defence or offence; reserving only to their owners the private property of herself, her son, and of the friends and officers of the reigning dynasty. These preliminaries agreed on, Marshal de Biron was invited to the conference, and gave up, in obedience to the command of his mistress, the keys of the Louvre.

CHAPTER XXV.

Ce fort château d'Auvergne fut un Tabor pour sa devotion, un Liban pour sa solitude, un Olympe pour ses exercices, un Parnasse pour ses Muses, et un Caucase pour ses afflictions.

HILARION DE COSTE.

THE stirring events which terminated in the flight of Valois, the surrender of the Louvre, and the royal dependances of the capital, created an intense interest, not merely over France, but throughout Christendom. The Prince of Parma, com-

mander of the Spanish forces in the Low Countries, and the first general of the age, declared that the Duke of Guise had either gone too far or stopped short of a wise policy; he should either have taken no violent steps against his liege's authority, or, in passing the boundaries of allegiance, should not have intrusted the enterprise of securing the person of the king to an army of undisciplined burgesses and monks. In France, the protector was either praised or condemned according to the politics and religion of the party who sat in judgment on his conduct; receiving a different award, as the judge happened to be Huguenot, leaguer, or royal partisan.

However inwardly chagrined at his thwarted policy, Guise repressed all outward demonstrations of ill feeling; and in an interview with Catherine at her hotel, whither she had retired, he said, very speciously, "I am not in rebellion against my honoured liege—but I cannot answer for the feelings and behaviour of the Council of Sixteen, who rule me as well as every other gentleman in the city."

While Valois, who had arrived safely at Chartres, was gradually assembling his friends and scattered troops, and regaining, though slowly, the retinue and pomp of majesty, the governors of provinces and of the military posts of the kingdom were speculating on the extent and liability of their allegiance.

When a vessel falls to pieces, each man clings to the nearest spar; when the executive power of a state is dissolved, and its laws are threatened with extinction or abeyance, every one in office asks himself the question—To whom is fealty due?

The searching policy of Catherine—the fiery threats of Montpensier—the malignant hatred of the ecclesiastics towards the dynasty of Valois—and the cautious yet persevering career of the protector—were, to their several originators, less harassing than the perplexity of those who held governments of the crown. The subtlest reasoners of this class argued thus:—the power of the king is crumbled into dust; and though the shadow of authority still lingers with his person, yet that will be dissipated when Guise leaves Paris and takes the field against him. But are we therefore to hold our commissions of the Protector of the League?—Assuredly not! Our lineage is as pure as his own, though, indeed, he boasts of a royal descent! Therefore we hold not of him—but of whom, then?

This second question generally reduced the self-interrogator to the painful necessity of denying allegiance both to Guise and

Valois, and to the consequent resolution of doing homage only to himself, with a firm determination of making every one within the limits of his rule perform the same ceremony. But the matter did not rest here. He who found himself lord and master of a province might be excused for an occasional dream of a diadem encircling his brows, and passing as an heir-loom to his descendants! To continue our former metaphor, —he who was strong enough seized a plank of the wreck, and left his brethren to sink or swim.

But among those in whom honour exercised a greater sway, and who gave allegiance where only it was due, ranked the Marquis de Cœuvres, an old gentleman, in whom simplicity of manners was joined to an inflexible rectitude of conduct. He was governor of the royal fortress of D'Usson, which had formerly been a state prison, and used for that purpose by the eleventh Louis, when the citadel of Loches was unable to accommodate the whole of its numerous guests.

D'Usson consisted of a castle with its dependances, situated on the summit of a basaltic rock, in the province of Auvergne; its base nearly encircled by a rapid stream, which threw itself into the river Allier, at the distance of a league from the rock. Nature had done her utmost to render the station impregnable; on every side it was protected by shelving precipices, with but one narrow path to the fortress, a winding causeway, overlooked and commanded by the battlements of the gate-tower. The table-land on the summit, admirably adapted for the purpose, was entirely surrounded by the walls of the fortress, in such wise that their foundations seemed to grow out of the rock as though it were their natural parent. To the spectators below no footing for assault was visible, even if soldiers were found hardy enough to attempt to scale the precipitous sides of the eminence.

Such was the aspect of D'Usson to its foes, presenting nothing but obstacles to the rash leader who should venture to beleaguer its lofty towers; but to those who found security and a place of refuge within its walls, the panoramic scene which it afforded was a source of pleasure and interest rarely surpassed. From the terrace on the roof of the principal tower was seen, towards the east, the opening of the romantic *St. Jean en Val*, with its winding stream and slopes of verdure; on the south, the course of the noble and rapid Allier, which the eye followed till it was lost amid the mountains. From the base of the rock to the banks of the river, the valley

named St. Germain *sous* D'Usson spread a rich banquet to the eye of the enraptured beholder, who, not contented with tracing the glistening mountain torrent to its junction with the Allier, looked westward across the latter stream, where in the distance stood the strong town of Issoire, backed by the heights, clothed to their summits with forests and heather.

Here, amid the beauties of a province which united the majestic solemnity of naked rocks and pinnacled crags with the loveliest and most pastoral retreats, resided the old marquis, perched aloof, far above the contention and din of arms which ever and anon disturbed the repose of the valleys. The garrison was far from numerous, but quite sufficient to defend a post which nature herself had fashioned into a stronghold for her children: and as the instructions of the governor were to keep himself quiet, and restrain his valour to the mere defence of the fortress, he was enabled to indulge himself in repose and luxury, while all beneath breathed of strife and rebellion.

De Cœuvres was in truth a simple-minded man, without ambition or ability, and had been selected by the queen-mother, through her opinion of his honesty. When the flattering mandate reached him at the Château de Cœuvres, he was a widower, and spent the greater portion of his time in tending the education of his daughter Gabrielle.

At D'Usson the scanty routine of official duties allowed him to continue the same gratifying task, and with such success, that Gabrielle promised to be a prodigy of learning;—that is to say, she read Marot, Pibrac, and Pasquier, and the poems also of the sprightly court poet, Ronsard; all, save the first-named poet, contemporary writers, whose effusions, in thick quarto and folio volumes, arrived in succession from the Parisian seat of the muses. Her knowledge of the classics was indeed confined to a translation of Ovid and several of the minor Latin poets, whose verses had been deemed worthy of imitation by the French wits of the sixteenth century; but to make amends, she had studied deeply the carols and songs of the troubadours, and was a rare proficient in the *langue d'oc*. She was also acquainted with the writings and *gesta* of the chroniclers, not merely of the chivalric era, but of the darker ages which preceded the crusades, when learned archbishops and good-tempered indolent monks sat in their "sunny oriels," and concocted tales and histories, in which the costume, and mode of thinking, and faith of the descendants of Charlemagne and

his heroes, were ingrafted upon classic incidents, and scenes in the cities of Greece and Rome.

But the effusions of the troubadours, so harmonious in their cadences, and seemingly the offspring of the moment, as joy or grief possessed the soul of the poet, and he strung his harp to sooth a weary hour or give vent to his rapture—were her favourites. As she paced the terrace of the fortress and looked towards the south—the land of the unforgotten minstrels whom she honoured, often would she exclaim with delight in the words of the enthusiastic Vidal—

I eagerly inhale the breeze
From thee, sweet Provence, blowing;
And all that's thine delights me so,
Such pleasant thoughts bestowing,
That if thy very name is named
I listen joyously,
And ask a hundred words for one—
So sweet to hear of thee.
And surely none can name a spot
So sweet in memory biding,
As 'twixt the Durance and the sea
Where the swift Rhone is gliding.*

Gabrielle d'Estrées was indeed worthy of a poet to sing the praises of her charms. She had never been at the court of Paris, and there was an air, certainly not of rusticity, as her life was passed in the society of equals, but of graceful yet reserved deportment, which could not have withstood the gay intercourse of the Louvre. Her stature was above the ordinary height of her sex, though within the limits of elegance and womanly proportion; and her captivating provincial aspect and healthful glow of complexion would have afforded a model for our own Spenser in his Belphœbe. If Arnaud de Marveil could have risen from his tomb he would have beheld another beauty, worthier of his praise than she whom he called—

Fairer than the far-famed Helen,
Lovelier than the flow'rets gay;
Snow-white teeth, and lips truth-telling,
Heart as open as the day,
Golden hair, and fresh bright roses:—

But we must forbear—the language of the troubadours is

* From the translation by the author of the Lays of the Minnesingers.

not for the present age. Gabrielle, in sober truth, was worth the storming of a castle, or even listening to the stories of her father, as he sat in an antique chair, and repeated his adventures at the court of the gallant Francis.

At the period to which our history has now arrived, his fair daughter had long ceased to benefit by his varied lore; and in return for the instruction which she had received from his parental care, was accustomed to amuse him, when tired of the recital of his reminiscences, with passages from her favourite poets and romancers.

The marquis was getting old and garrulous, and enjoyed the comforts of his sinecure post, in an age which was stirring men's blood into the activity and rancour of party strife and warfare. Hitherto the periodical wars with the Huguenots had been treated as a matter of course, and did not even interfere, during the intervals of peace, with marriage alliances between the partisans of the rival sects; but when Valois was driven from his palace by the ambitious Protector of the League, every Frenchman saw the necessity of buckling on his armour for the cause he espoused.

De Cœuvres was, however, unmoved, save in his indignation against the disloyal priesthood and citizens, whom he stigmatized in terms becoming the loyalty of a faithful servant of his liege. But the even tenor of his life was not disturbed either by the threatened hostilities between Valois and Guise, or by the excursions of Navarre, who, since the breaking up of the winter, had penetrated into Auvergne with his cavalry. More than once had the gallant leader of the Huguenots made pretence of beleaguering D'Usson, but the old marquis only laughed at these hostile dispositions; and as he performed his daily inspection of the battlements, would derisively point out to the slender garrison with his cane, the encampment of the heretics.

In these military perambulations he was accompanied by one who performed the duties of steward, seneschal of the castle, and chamberlain. Monsieur Pomini, as he designated himself, was the son of an artisan of Avignon, who had acquired sufficient wealth to leave his son in a better condition than that in which his own humble career had commenced. Pomini, who was clever and industrious, rapidly acquired whatever knowledge and learning fell within his reach; and being of an ambitious turn of mind, he resolved that his own career should commence where that of his father had terminated. Yet though commerce was open to him, and he had the example be-

fore his eyes of merchants who vied with the noblesse in the splendour of their houses and the profusion of their viands, he despised the attainment of so vulgar a station, and determined to force his way within the pale of gentility or die in the struggle. He observed closely the various and conflicting conditions of life, and more especially its outward forms and observances;—from the rude charcoal-burner to the monarch on the throne, his acute mind had sedulously traced the occupations and privileges of every intervening title and grade of society.

"If I become a merchant," said the young man, "I may never fairly rank as a gentleman, though I could purchase half a province. It would be a blot on my escutcheon—that must not be—other modes shall be tried!"

His money was speedily changed for land, and he became the owner of six farms. His next measure was to leave Avignon; it was a disagreeable place in his eyes—so much so that he would gladly have seen the plough-share furrowing the earth where palace and hovel were together congregated and cemented by the labour of centuries. He was now in possession of the territory, and only wanted the letters-patent of gentility, which he flattered himself would some day fall to his lot, without having ever stained himself with mercantile or artistical occupations.

The third step was to attach himself in some way or other to the fortunes of a powerful noble, in whose service or suite he could wait hard by the boundaries of his object, till an opportunity presented itself of overleaping the enclosure. To accomplish this last and master-point of policy he trusted to his assiduity and keenness of vision—and trusted intuitively, for he was not conscious of the extent of his own talents, nor even of their direct scope. But nature had indicated her aim by desire; which, fortunately for Pomini, was suffered to expand in a congenial atmosphere, and bore him onward triumphantly.

About the time of his leaving Avignon chance threw him in the way of the marquis, who in addition to the family domain and marquisate of Cœuvres, possessed lands near Avignon, whither he had repaired to gather in his harvest. They were mutually struck with each other; the incipient gentleman with the *governor* of D'Usson, and the marquis with the *bonhomie*, harmless vanity, and lively discourse of Pomini. A treaty commenced and was concluded; and the contemner of the merchants of Marseilles and Avignon took office under De

Cœuvres, who, on his part, thought his recruit a better harvest than the produce of the corn-fields by the Rhone.

Nor was the old governor mistaken in his man. The seneschal enlivened the gloom of the fortress during the long winter evenings with his never-ceasing conversation and bustle, and the new officer was pleased that he had now the model of a gentleman ever present, which he might study at leisure;—the only drawback was its age, as he feared he might adopt, by untimely imitation, forms of speech and other matters of personal demeanour, belonging not to gentility in the abstract, but to old age. But from this fear he was released by the periodical arrival of the neighbouring noblesse, who came to pay their respects and visits to the marquis, and gave the seneschal the wished-for opportunity of mixing with the class to which his ambition aspired.

That it is necessary to stoop to conquer, was not so much the policy as the faith of Pomini, who had a wise humility of heart, which made even pride subservient to prudence; and the aspirant to nobility was in consequence the very best and most diligent of servants. In a short time his presence was as requisite to the comforts of the governor as his daily food; the seneschal, chamberlain, and steward, became adviser, confidant, and friend. Pomini, who remarked the happy effects of his servility, thought that his object was near the period of accomplishment, and intended, on the first favourable opportunity, to obtain from Valois, through the interest of the governor, the title and territorial privileges of a gentleman.

"Yes!" exclaimed the chamberlain, starting from a revery; —"it would sound exceedingly well! Monsieur l'Isle du Marais! If there be a much longer delay, I will make old De Cœuvres go to Paris on purpose. The foundation of a house which may exist for centuries—the Pominies of L'Isle du Marais!—is surely an affair of importance—at least my great-grandsons will think so! Besides, there was a L'Isle du Marais a century ago, though not a trace of the château exists, and the lordship itself is extinguished; or, indeed, I would have taken the name by right of purchase. Well! may not the Languedoc herald, a hundred years hence, connect my pedigree with the old family?"

But the bright visions of the seneschal were about to be disturbed for awhile by the untoward fortunes of Valois. When the news reached D'Usson that the king had been forced to fly for his life from the Louvre, the indignation of De Cœuvres did not exceed the grief of Pomini. If Guise became monarch, it

were doubtful whether the great-grandson of the seneschal would be in a condition to bribe the Languedoc herald.

This consideration so overwhelmed him, that he ardently wished he had never seen the marquis, but had attached himself to the League in preference.

"It will never do for me to be lingering here," said the disconsolate Pomini; "I must be on that side which has the ascendency—I must have a patron who possesses the ear of royalty—if his present majesty should be deposed or slain before I get my patent—of what avail have been the years passed at D'Usson, humouring a silly old man, and listening to stories which our fair Mademoiselle Gabrielle is glad to escape from? Sacre! By the house of L'Isle du Marais! I will become a leaguer if the protector triumph! Is an honourable house to have no existence because of these silly passing affairs? By our lady of Good-luck! I stand in a predicament—if affairs go on at this rate, I will not order another sheep to be killed at D'Usson—I will starve or poison them all, except mademoiselle, and deliver up the castle to him who has Montjoie at his elbow—be he Valois, Lorraine, or the devil!"

He was in truth quite disordered with the news; instead of his usual smirking address, he stared the old marquis out of countenance as he waited to receive his evening's instructions respecting the night-watch, and other matters connected with the economy of the fortress; and snapped his fingers audibly, out of pure vexation, while Gabrielle was reciting an old legend.

"What ails you, Pomini," said the governor, who was almost buried in his large chair, "that you cannot wait till I have heard out this brave old *gesta?* Gabrielle has disappointed me three successive nights, and I shall never hear the end of it!"

"Well! monseigneur," cried his daughter, shutting up the book; "you must now attend more closely to your official duties—who knows but Pomini has a tale to tell of an enemy marching up the causeway? I shall leave you to yourselves."

"But—Gabrielle!" almost shouted the governor, as he saw her preparing to leave the chamber, "when shall I learn the fate of the brave Armorican knight—tell me, did he rescue the lady?"

"Ah! monseigneur!" cried Gabrielle, turning to her father with a smile intended as a recompense for her running away; "that mode of telling a story will never do. You shall hear all as it is written."

But, seeing that her smile had not vanquished his displeasure, she approached the chair in which he was seated—stepping across the room with such a winning air of persuasion that the seneschal could have fallen on his knees and worshipped her in place of his favourite *Notre Dame de Bonne Aventure*—or Good-luck, as we have before rendered it. The marquis held out his hand, which Gabrielle took; and after pressing it to her lips, said, playfully,—

"Now cannot you, brave chevalier, fancy yourself for one evening the hero of a real romance—that D'Usson is an enchanted castle—I a sorceress, holding you, a prince, in captivity—and Pomini, your esquire? Cannot you fancy such a change?"

"Most truly," replied the marquis, yielding to her humour.

"Then," rejoined Gabrielle, smiling, "you would wish the sorceress out of your presence, that you might hold counsel with your faithful esquire on the best chance of escape."

And so saying, and without waiting for a reply, the lady retired to her own chamber overlooking the valley of St. Germain.

"It is very strange!" said De Cœuvres; "a malady has broken out at D'Usson! Gabrielle was till lately fond of reading to me—ay, till midnight, if I had suffered her—but now she runs away to her chamber every evening thus early. And you, Pomini, have caught the disease in a most virulent manner. It has stiffened your back, starched the muscles of your face, and turned your eyes into stone—"

"What! Do you not think I walk like a gentleman?" asked Pomini, ever anxious on the score of his personal attainments.

"You are the prince of chamberlains!" replied the marquis, smiling;—"if King Francis of happy memory were alive, he would not wish a goodlier pair of legs to walk before him to the chamber which bears his name."

"I wish his grandson would visit us," said the seneschal.

"My poor master!" said De Cœuvres,—"I hope he will never be reduced to the necessity of flying here for refuge. It would be a sad day for the house of Valois."

"Ours is an uncertain life, monseigneur," said Pomini,—"the world is ever changing its rulers. One dynasty succeeds another. There is no longer any living of the ancient family of L'Isle du Marais, but—"

"What have your cursed marshes to do with the destinies of France?" exclaimed the marquis, between anger and mirth.

"Now that the seigneurial rights have passed away, not much," replied Pomini, gravely.

"If I were a young man and a soldier," said De Cœuvres, who was, however, conscious of his own love of ease,—"I should pine away in this lofty retreat if gallant deeds were doing on the plains of France. I never fought but once, and that once against the Huguenots at the battle of Jarnac. We beat them gloriously. I will describe the movements of the heretics.—Their cavalry were stationed at—"

But now that considerable doubt existed of the power of Valois to assist his old servant the marquis, Pomini was determined not to bear the repetition of the battle of Jarnac. He ventured rather rudely to interrupt the governor, by asking him if he had heard of the new demonstration which the heretics had made that day.

"What of them?" exclaimed the marquis, hastily; "did the girl then speak truth? Why not tell me before?"

Pomini would not have been much puzzled to explain satisfactorily the reason of his silence respecting an event of which he had never heard; but rather than hear the movement of the columns at Jarnac, he narrated a movement of his own invention, which implied that Navarre had marched from *St. Jean en Val* to *St. Germain sous D'Usson;* but the seneschal, on a sudden, recollecting that his fabrication would be discovered in the morning, added to it by saying that the Huguenots marched back again.

Old De Cœuvres burst out into a loud fit of laughter, to the great dismay of his subaltern, who however recovered from his alarm on the governor saying—

"They might as well attempt to pluck a star from heaven as to scale this eyry. Poor Navarre has not a single piece of cannon! What folly has induced him to waste his time in loitering in the valleys? One would suppose he thinks himself a basilisk, or a snake, which fascinates its prey. But I'll tell you how the case stands, Pomini.—You can sit down there!"

The poor seneschal obeyed, though screwing his toes within his shoes through vexation.

"The King of Navarre," continued the marquis, "is a mere creature of impulse. He is brave and daring, but persevering only for a season: he would have lived and died in the Louvre had he not been aroused by shame and the entreaties of his friends. The affair at Coutras was very clever, but such a victory will not happen again, unless De Rosny, and De Gram-

mont, and De Vivans keep close at his elbow. At Paris he was always engaged in some affair of the heart, and I dare say that is his present predicament, and his friends will discover that the spring campaign in Auvergne has for its object a dalliance with a pretty peasant girl, or perhaps the wife of a burgess or noble of Issoire, though indeed he is on the wrong side of the river for that town. Heed not the movements of Navarre unless our friends below bring word of the arrival of De Nevailles or De Rosny at his camp;—the heretic must be wound up before he can be set a going, though I allow his movements are then very rapid."

"Should we not lay our account in expecting the protector's troops to come in search of the heretics?" inquired the seneschal, who was sensitively alive to the movements of the former party.

"And what if they do?" cried De Cœuvres, "if Guise and all his forces were beneath in the valley, I would not alter my conduct in any one particular. Nay—I wish they were, for then Gabrielle would perhaps stay here and read, instead of running to the solitude of her own chamber. But Guise is still in Paris, and Valois between him and Auvergne.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Sans rien blamer, je sers une maîtresse,
Qui toute femme ayant noble hautesse
Passe en vertus, et qui porte le nom
D'une fleur belle: et en royal surnom
Demonstre bien son antique noblesse.

LOUANGE A MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

NOT many days after the conversation narrated in the last chapter, the marquis was walking on the terrace of the castle accompanied by Gabrielle. On the battlements beneath were stationed Jean la Roche, an old soldier who had served in every campaign against the Huguenots, and his comrade, a young recruit, whom the governor had induced to leave the valley for the aerial fortress and military duties of the garrison.

"By St. Genevieve! but you'll make a rare sentinel!" exclaimed Jean, addressing his companion.

"And tell me why?" asked the recruit.

"You look two ways at the same time," replied the veteran; —"one eye upon your own valley, and the other at the terrace—but have a care!—and never trouble yourself with things above you!"

The young man blushed through his sunburnt complexion.

"Robert," said La Roche, who perceived the confusion of the peasant-soldier, "that old gentleman who is now peeping down upon us is an excellent master for one fond of ease; but you ought to see more of the world than you can meet with in this eagle's nest. Old as I am, I should like to have a dash at the heretics if there were more of us;—but this is a bad school for a recruit, by St. Louis! I wish that King of Navarre would try the steep road, just for once, that I might draw my cartridge in a natural way—but he is a sluggard."

"I thought they were scaling the rock the other night," said Robert; "it was the night-watch, and I was standing on the opposite angle, when I heard a strange noise like men creeping up the sides—but all was quiet after a while, though I stretched my hearing to catch the sound."

"And did you not tell the marquis, or the pompous seneschal?" inquired the old soldier.

"What, to be laughed at," replied Robert, "as you did at me just now, because I looked at the governor's tall daughter? No; I know better than that, by our Lady of St. Germain! I was born within sight of D'Usson, and I never heard of any road but the one cut on purpose for the troops—and the noise I heard was in the wrong quarter. It must have been the wind whistling in the crannies, or an old witch—our Lady preserve us!—riding through the air."

"Ah," cried the veteran, dryly, "I am a heretic on the score of witches, except those like the bright lady Gabrielle, who turns all our heads. She is the witch of D'Usson, brother Robert; but I have seen too many of her sex to be out of my senses for more than a second—just a glance of the eye, as though a strong light flashed across it, and that's all. There was the Queen of Navarre, a braver lady than our governor's daughter. I have seen her at Fontainebleau, and at the Louvre, when that testy old fellow Marshal de Biron, commanded our regiment of arquebusiers. I was on guard at Notre Dame when she was married in front of the church to the King of Navarre, whom, by-the-by, I have not seen, Robert, since the day before yesterday in the morning."

"You have seen kings and queens and princes from all

parts of the world," said Robert, resting his arquebuse against the battlements; "but tell me, is not our Lady Gabrielle very like a queen when she walks by us on the parade, and returns our salute so graciously?"

"May be she is," replied Jean la Roche, whose memory was busy with his own tale, "but I was saying, I saw the Queen of Navarre married. How proudly she looked. Ah! by St. Genevieve! that was my picture of what a queen should be. The young prince attempted to smile and be gallant, but she frowned him into humility."

"What, was he ugly?" cried Robert.

"No, not that," replied the veteran, smiling at the ignorance of his comrade, "but the marriage was forced upon her by that smooth-tongued, stealthy cat her mother. She hated Navarre as she would have hated any other pretender to her hand, except, perhaps, as it was whispered, a secret favourite. But let that pass. You should have seen the princess when the archbishop asked her if she took the king for a husband—she never spoke, but looked like a woman crazed, or dreaming of something else."

"And were they so cruel as to marry the poor lady?" asked Robert, who always listened with interest to the stories of his talkative comrade.

"Marry her!" cried Jean, "why her brother Charles and his mother would have married her to one of the towers of Notre Dame if they had fancied it. But she had courage not to answer the archbishop, so the old Cardinal de Bourbon, who happened to stand behind the princess, pushed forward her head with his rude hand—and the nod was reckoned as good as a word by her mother."

"Ah, that would not have done for me," cried the peasant, tossing his head, "my wife should have spoken, or I would have left the church and gone home, and—"

But the speaker was interrupted by the marquis, who shouted, "La Roche, you idler! are they friends or foes in the south? and send Robert to alarm the warden."

"Umph," growled the veteran, "while talking to you about Notre Dame, the old gentleman has caught me at fault."

La Roche, who aspired, as became a soldier who had served under De Biron, to the distinction of a strict disciplinarian, was angry that the governor, whom he accounted as a nobody in respect of military skill, should discover the approach of strangers ere he himself was aware of it. His practised eye, in looking in the direction pointed out by the marquis, perceived

a cavalcade, alternately within sight and disappearing for awhile behind the rocks and foliage which obscured the southern valley.

Navarre, it was reported, had removed his quarters to a more distant part of the province, and left the valleys *sous* D'Usson free to the intercourse which ordinarily subsisted between the inhabitants of the fortress and their more lowly neighbours. It was not, therefore, without apprehension of being again blockaded and obliged to resort to the garrison stores, that the dwellers of the mount viewed the approach of a new enemy.

But all doubt of the further continuance of their daily supply of fresh provisions was set at rest when the number and condition of the strangers were ascertained. The imaginary army dwindled into an humble escort engaged in the safe conduct of a litter and its fair burden, who was obviously bound for the lofty castle which rose before their path.

"And who does us the honour of a visit in these perilous times?" exclaimed the marquis, as he bent his eyes with anxious gaze on the litter, which was now ascending the mountain.

"It is Valois," cried Gabrielle; "I can see the *fleur-de-lis* on the litter."

"No," shouted the governor, almost in a passion with his fair daughter, "you do his majesty wrong! what, travel like a woman?"

"And why not?" replied the lady, "he dresses like a monk."

"I do not like his taste, certainly," rejoined the marquis; "but there is one now spurring up the causeway who will soon change our speculations into certainty."

Though it was beneath the dignity of the governor to be present at the arrival of stranger-guests, yet a tolerably strong muster was made at the gate-tower, as much for pomp as security. At the demand of a stranger who with his servant had preceded the escort, the gates were opened; and Pomini in a dress, the fantastic compound of the habiliments of a page and a gentleman, presented himself with his men, and bowing very low, inquired the name and rank of the visiters.

"I ask of the Marquis de Cœuvres," replied the stranger, "the hospitality of D'Usson for the Queen of Navarre."

A flush of joy overspread the face of Pomini at these words. To have the honour of receiving a queen was worth listening to the hundred times repeated stories of the governor; and so impressed was the seneschal with his good fortune, that he resolved not to communicate the intelligence to the marquis,

who, in duty bound, would have descended to meet the majestic daughter of France.

"Now is arrived the crisis of my fortune," said Pomini to himself; "the Queen of Navarre can do more with her family than the old gentleman my master."

Fortunately for the consequence of the seneschal, the two pages of the household were present with the troops; they were showy youths, and would not have disgraced the Louvre.

"Her majesty is most welcome to D'Usson!" replied Pomini to the demand of her attendant.

The stranger, who was no other than our friend De Nevailles, saw before him a tall, well-limbed man, with handsome features certainly, but destitute of noble expression or military daring, and was consequently at a loss to determine his rank; for though the decisiveness of his reply indicated authority, yet De Cœuvres, as the baron had been informed, was an old man. Determined, however, to apply the touchstone to his presumption, he said quietly—

"Her majesty will most gratefully thank you for this courtesy, monseigneur."

At the word monseigneur a titter was observable on the faces of all the group, save that of the would-be L'Isle du Marais, who was at a loss whether to accept or reject the proffered honour. The implied discovery of the pretender was not unobserved by Antoine, who had followed his master, and now echoed him, saying—

"Ay, and her hungry servants too, most illustrious seigneur!"

Pomini found himself involved in a dilemma which might be productive of ridiculous consequences; but nowise daunted, he determined to brave it out, in spite of the ill-concealed mirth of the household and the military.

He advanced beyond the gateway to meet the royal litter; and the curtains being drawn aside, he beheld, for the first time, the far-famed Queen of Navarre, whose brilliant complexion was heightened by the excitement of the journey, and the busy thoughts which agitated her mind. Beside her sat a lady, with whom the reader is more familiar than the Seneschal of d'Usson;—it was Emilie, whom Margaret, faithful to her promise, had demanded of and obtained her release from, the convent at Avignon.

Since the glorious victory at Coutras, Margaret had been silently preparing to quit the uncertain protection of the queen-mother, and seek, through the aid of her consort, a retreat, to

which her *protégée* might repair with security. But in that age, as in the present, money was the sinew of motion; and of this necessary commodity the Queen of Navarre was extremely deficient. She had, in truth, been cheated by her brothers out of her father's legacy destined for her provision, in addition to the domains apportioned to a daughter of France. It was in vain she applied to the Queen of France to supply the deficiency; Catherine had enough to do in paying spies, providing for favourites, and making donations to the troops and partisans of her son's family. This being the case, the Queen of Navarre resolved to pay herself when and wherever she could; but as the period was approaching when Emilie would be forced to comply with the terms of her novitiate at Avignon, Margaret saw the necessity of hastening to rescue her from the threatened doom of the veil.

The battle of the barricades and consequent flight of her brother happening at this time, the scheming princess saw a fair opportunity of escape, which she accomplished through the assistance of the good-natured Father Roquelaure, who accompanied her to the south, as his presence was necessary to extricate her charge from the conventual imprisonment to which she had been subjected by Catherine.

The trio, attended by the faithful servants of the princess, were travelling to implore the protection of the King of Navarre, when they fortunately came in contact with the Baron de Nevailles, whose restless mind was leading him towards Avignon, with the expectation of discovering the retreat of Emilie ere the threatening storm of political warfare should hurry him within its vortex. The joy of the lovers may easily be conceived; the more especially, as neither Margaret nor the confessor frowned on the meeting.

The Queen of Navarre was indeed in want of the baron's aid, which she joyfully accepted; nor did she object to his attentions to her young friend, if he were content to live in hope, and without requiring to be informed of the secret history of their friendship towards each other, and mutual dislike of the queen-mother.

Navarre was known to be in Auvergne, and thither the happy travellers proceeded in search of him, arriving before D'Usson in the manner we have just related. A brilliant idea entered the mind of Margaret when she beheld the lofty rocks on which the fortress was built, its impregnability, and romantic site; but without communicating her sudden resolve, she

simply requested the baron to ask of De Cœuvres the hospitality of the castle for a daughter of France.

Flushed with her scheme, she drew aside the curtains on approaching the gate-tower, and at the expected presence of the old governor; but in his place stood the smirking and bowing Pomini, who was dazzled with the beauty of the fair voyagers, and quite forgot the graceful Gabrielle. Margaret smiled inwardly at his officiousness, but she saw at a glance that he was her own, and might be moulded to her purpose. This was sufficient to induce her to return his civilities with condescension, and make him the proudest of men. He already fancied himself Monsieur l'Isle du Marais, and even went so far as to presume on the possible acquisition of a baron's coronet and mantling.

The cortége passed into the interior court, where the queen and Emilie alighted, and were conducted by the enraptured seneschal into the hall. Great was the indignation of the loyal governor when one of the pages ran to inform him that his visiter was the Queen of Navarre; but as it was too late to proceed to the court-yard, where he could only dispute with his servant in the honour of the reception, he wisely resolved to take up a position with his daughter in their saloon of state; and in order to increase the group, the page was desired to bring his fellow immediately, that they twain might be in readiness to do honour to royalty, and reflect a proper dignity on the rank of the governor.

But for this *coup d'état* there was more than abundant time; for Pomini indulged in his usual artifice with visiters, of conducting them through the entire suite of rooms of the castle ere he introduced them to the marquis; commenting the while on the antique beauty of the furniture, the lofty proportions of the chambers, and the historical importance of the royal château.

"Stay! stay! monsieur!" said the fatigued Queen of Navarre; "has not the marquis a fair daughter—a pearl of price? Let us not delay in doing her honour."

"Her beauty can only be eclipsed by the bright luminaries before whom I now stand!" replied the assiduous and crafty seneschal: "and your majesty shall see her soon."

But Monsieur Pomini had something yet in store for his new friends, ere their eyes were to be blessed with the presence of the Lady Gabrielle. To the surprise of the queen and her suite, he opened a small door behind the tapestry of the last

chamber, and disappeared from view of his visiters, but soon returned with a bundle of torches, which were speedily lighted.

"What! torches in day-time?" cried Margaret, in surprise.

"Your majesty must consider that it is the fault of the architect, not mine," replied the obsequious seneschal.

Any one but De Nevailles would have dissuaded the queen from proceeding further, but his curiosity and love of eccentricity were deeply interested in the *dénouement* of this strange proceeding, and he resolved to let the seneschal go the full length of his line.

The tapestry was put aside, and one by one, following each other, the visitants passed through the narrow door-way, and entered on a stone gallery or corridor. The light of the torches displayed the rudeness of the masonry, and the awful prison-like gloom of the gallery. The royal party began to doubt the sincerity of their guide.

"Is De Cœuvres a hermit?" exclaimed Margaret;—"does he live in a cell?"

Pomini made no reply, for he was preparing for his last effort.

Suddenly he stopped, and waved aloft his torch, commanding the attendants to do the same. At his invitation the party approached the spot whereon he stood, but were awe-struck with the seeming horror of their position. They were no longer enclosed between the walls of the gallery, but found themselves standing on a balcony, projecting into the murky space. Above and beneath was utter darkness;—the partial, dim atmosphere of light which surrounded them was just sufficient to make the awful gloom visible.

De Nevailles caught hold of the seneschal. "Why this mystery?" said he, not knowing whether it were prudent to express alarm.

"Look!" exclaimed the seneschal, beckoning the party to approach the iron railing which skirted the balcony. Impelled by mingled curiosity and dread, Margaret and her friends ventured to obey Pomini's bidding.

"Now watch the descending light," exclaimed the mysterious functionary: and at the words, he and his domestics threw their torches into the abyss.

The glaring, whirling meteors, as they fell, illumined the cavernous sides of the descent, and impressed the awe-struck gazers with terror of the dreadful gulf over which they stood. After many a mazy gyration the lights reached the bottom, and burned flickeringly in the abyss.

The group surveyed them from above with awe.

"Something shines close to the red light of that farthest torch!" cried De Nevailles, who was the first to break silence.

"Very likely," said Pomini, in a careless tone; "the sculls are scattered about in profusion."

A cry of horror arose from the fair living dames at this announcement; nor was their dread diminished by discovering that they were now in total darkness.

"By St. Hubert!" exclaimed the baron, "it would be only doing justice to throw you to the spirits beneath! Tell us what means this? or you shall rue your mischief!"

"Where those torches burn are the dungeons of D'Usson," replied Pomini. "There his majesty Louis, the eleventh of that name, of happy memory, kept the state prisoners, whose treason was manifest. Your majesty's ancestor," continued the seneschal, speaking to the Queen of Navarre, "was a wise prince—no one could escape from these depths."

"Let us away from the horrid sight," cried the queen, who had retained the hand of Emilie out of fear.

"There is no danger from this conceited fool!" whispered De Nevailles, who was close to mademoiselle.

As the road was straight, no great difficulty was found by the visiters in groping their way out of the gallery into the genial light of day, and the warm tapestried chamber. But their anger now vented itself against the seneschal; he was surrounded by a circle of inquisitors, who threatened him with every punishment which they could think of.

"If I had been anxious only to revenge an insult to my sovereign," said De Nevailles, "your body would have been flung after the torches."

"But why show us these curiosities when the marquis is waiting?" exclaimed Margaret, who could not repress a smile at the singular occurrence.

Pomini, who was taken off his guard by the cheerful speech of the queen, replied with *naïveté*, that since the visit of the Abbé Bourdeille de Brantome to D'Usson he had taken his advice, which was to display the dreary depths of the prison caverns to visiters ere he introduced them into the presence of the Lady Gabrielle, that her lightsome beauty might strike the beholders with all the force of intense contrast.

A peal of laughter followed this explanation, which was uttered in a tone that at once displayed the vanity and weakness of the seneschal, at the same time that it bespoke the sincerity of the impulse.

"Ah! the Abbé de Brantome is a man I reverence," said De Nevailles; "his wit leaves a rough mark on every softer mind it comes in collision with."

Meanwhile the outraged dignity of the marquis was exposed to further degradation by the delay. He walked about the saloon, fretting away the wearisome minutes with his daughter and the two pages, the sole remnant of a household busily engaged in their several offices of taking charge of the visiters' horses, attending to the comforts of the fatigued servants of her majesty, and lastly, but more honourably, swelling the train of the magnificent Pomini.

Margaret and her friends were speedily restored to good-humour, and followed the seneschal to the reception-chamber of the governor, laughing and talking the while of the eccentricity of their guide. Their gay, debonair bearing, and sportive looks, contrasted laughably with the traces of ill-humour on the face of the marquis, who inwardly vowed revenge upon the pompous functionary.

De Cœuvres had been a gallant in his season of pride, and retained the feeling in his old age; and Margaret was a divinity in whose presence care was wont to hide its head in disguise. He bent his knee before the daughter of France, and his homage was rendered as much to her beauty as her rank;—Pomini was forgotten when the Queen of Navarre bent forward gracefully with a show of raising the loyal Governor of D'Usson.

While these salutations passed between the principal performers, the two younger and rival beauties had leisure to survey each other's attractions and power. Gabrielle wondered who might be the graceful companion of royalty, with her air of birth and romantic features, which had the same fascination over the fair chatelaine of D'Usson as they had exercised on Villa Franca, when he first beheld them in the Louvre. Emilie was not less struck with the charms of Gabrielle, whose stature beamed with light.

In the eyes of all the spectators save one, Gabrielle bore away the palm of beauty; she looked a magnificent creation, like Venus on the ocean's surface—a dazzling splendour—no second glance was needed to appreciate her power. Emilie could boast of no atmosphere of light—no ray as of divinity; her beauty was earth-born; in the gallery of creation a connoisseur might pass her by, attracted by brighter luminaries; but when his eyes had drunk their fill of these, he would have

returned spell-bound to gaze on the picturesque features of which he had only previously caught a momentary glance.

Gabrielle had also the advantage of circumstances; her dress was arranged with care, and at leisure; her hair bound with jewels, which glittered among auburn tresses; Emilie was, on the contrary, in her travelling-apparel, and careless of display.

De Nevailles, as may be imagined, was much struck with the fair chatelaine, and his thoughts recurred to the advice of the Abbé De Brantome. Roquelaure, who had been remarkably silent since his entry into the castle, now found leisure to exchange a few words with the seneschal, who rejoiced the heart of the worthy Cordelier with a prospect of good-living, to which his travelling stomach had been for some time a stranger. D'Usson appeared to his reverence a most desirable abode; nothing was wanting to the comforts of life; wealth, profusion, and plenty, seemed to abound, and bright eyes also to gladden the daily feast. He never felt a greater contempt for the monks of La Chartreux (since called Trappists) than when listening to the account which Pomini narrated of the heaped-up stores of provisions in the fortress, and daily supplies from the peasants of the valleys. Who would wish to quit such a home?

When the usual civilities of meeting had been exchanged between the governor and the royal guest, her suite was severally introduced to the notice of himself and his fair daughter. De Nevailles was passed off as her majesty's secretary, and the Lady Emilie as Mademoiselle de Boufrement, an orphan, and attendant on the queen. The office of the Cordelier needed no explanation, save that his Christian name of Henri was substituted for the name of his family, which latter he had borne at his convent, to distinguish him from another Henri of equal piety, though of less growth.

These matters settled, and the ladies made friends, or seemingly such, Margaret was fairly domiciled at Château D'Usson. Never was company better assorted to prevent *ennui*. The marquis fancied himself young again, and became the slave of her majesty; Pomini was in disgrace, and deprived of his triple post; but for the office of steward a glad substitute was found in Roquelaure;—while De Nevailles ventured to speak to Gabrielle oftener and more pointedly than became his prior attentions to the *protégée* of Margaret. The queen herself was silently plotting an affair of great moment, and paid little attention to the proceedings of those around her, except in the silent

encouragement which she afforded Pomini, and her at length successful intercession in his favour with the governor. Gabrielle cared neither for De Nevailles, the queen, or even her youthful rival, save in occasionally piquing her jealousy by listening to the baron. While Emilie, the most unhappy of the dwellers in D'Usson, was alternately indignant and smooth-tempered with her eccentric lover.

One day, while De Nevailles was listening to the comments of Gabrielle on a favourite Provençal poet, he observed that Emilie suddenly left the room. It might be, he thought, an accidental occurrence, yet it awoke in him a sense of remorse for daring to trifle with the feelings of her for whom he had cherished fond hopes, while hopes were all his love's inheritance, and whom he had now slighted for a passing, though brilliant meteor. Gabrielle had indeed captivated his eyes, and nothing more; though with the tyranny of a lover he had suffered his admiration to assume a character of too outward a form.

At once repentant, he resolved to sue for his pardon, and framing an excuse for quitting Gabrielle, he sought out the injured Emilie. She had retired to the terrace to brood over her disappointment, amid the varied and romantic scenes which met the view on every side.

"Emilie!" exclaimed the baron, as he stole on her unperceived.

She turned round, but was too much offended or grieved to reply.

"Speak, Emilie! but one word!" continued De Nevailles; —"I am penitent and full of shame."

But De Boufrement had lived with Margaret and the queen-mother, and imbibed a portion of their spirit. She was proudly silent.

"Have you not resolution, Emilie, to forgive my infirmity—my folly—it was nothing more—a transient cloud on our happiness. Summer days have such, but they melt away as soon as formed."

"You shall see I have resolution, monseigneur!" replied mademoiselle, calmly. She drew from her bosom the sketch of herself, taken from Villa Franca in the queen's picture-gallery, which she had preserved as a token of their first meeting. Ere the baron could prevent the catastrophe, the paper was borne fluttering among the shelving rocks beneath the fortress.

As he rushed forward, though too late to rescue the lost

treasure, a laugh reminded the lovers that they were watched. It was the Queen of Navarre, who had beheld the rencounter, though without knowing its cause.

"This is too bad, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Margaret, "to set your knight such an impossible task! Would you have him fling himself after the tender epistle; or are his labours to commence upward from the valley?"

"What, angry!" continued the queen, after a pause;—"Well! I am sure it is the fault of the baron! But leave him to me, Emilie, and I will impose such a penance for his crimes as he will never forget till the day of his death!"

The lady retired without looking at her lover. Margaret laughed at this demonstration of anger.

"Never mind her, De Nevailles," said the queen; "there must be moral contrasts as well as those presented to us by Pomini the Pompous, now restored to his seneschalship."

"But I am in the wrong, as your majesty would have perceived, had not your attention been so much occupied of late," replied the baron.

"Then I have no time now to upbraid you," rejoined Margaret:—"Have you considered my intended conduct with respect to D'Usson in the light of a matter of conscience?"

"That is a fitter study for Father Henri!" replied De Nevailles, smiling.

"I dare scarce trust him with the secret," said the queen; "it would be too hard a strain on his faith, though I might, perhaps, make certain of his complaisance."

"Precedents in your majesty's favour," rejoined De Nevailles, "crowd upon me on every side. But there is one homely argument which I hold above every other;—that in the present situation of your family, if you delay much longer seizing the rights which have been unjustly denied you, there will soon be nothing left for you to take. The case appears to stand thus:—the legacy demised by your royal father has never been paid over into your majesty's hands; it has been spent without your concurrence, in propping up a feeble government, and your repeated solicitations have been laughed at;—your majesty smiles!"

"I imagined myself in the court of Parliament, and listening to its president," said the Queen of Navarre.

The baron bowed as gravely as any president, and retaining an attitude as stiff and formal as the most witless advocate, continued:—

"As long as those whom you sue hold their present rank

and possessions, your majesty has naught to fear on the score of inability to satisfy your just demand, if inclination should lead them into that path. But you have already waited till their resources are considerably lessened, and ere another session be passed, they may themselves be destitute of even as much as you ask for. What course does prudence dictate? The same which governed the actions of your majesty's unfortunate and lamented brother, François d'Alençon. He saw the crown about to be reft away from the family, through the incapacity of his elder brother, and he said to himself;—'This is a question which concerns me, for if Valois suffer his diadem to be snatched off by a rebel, my presumptive birth-right will be for ever foreclosed! Shall I suffer this? No!'—His illustrious sister whom I have now, in all humility, the honour of addressing, knows the result of this reasoning—his vigorous policy, his enterprising spirit, his mercenary army, and feeble officers. Let me stop here, for I see your majesty is moved."

"The same reasoning," continued De Nevailles, after a pause to allow Margaret to recover herself, "applies with twofold power to your own case. Your birth-right is in jeopardy—that, indeed, which you ought long since to have received; whereas the claims of monsieur, though justly grounded, were only prospective. Will you hesitate to adopt his decisive policy—ay, and with firmer purpose? If all that Valois possess, either of his own or in trust, be taken away, can your majesty and your servants subsist on whining consolation, which he may probably in his remorse offer you?"

"I am firm to my own conviction!" cried Margaret, with energy.

"Then D'Usson is your own," replied the baron.

"Navarre would help us," continued he, "and my liege cannot be far off—yet it would hurt your reputation as a good Catholic to allow heretics to supplant those of the true faith. My retainers are with Navarre, yet we had better trust to our own resources."

"We have not a Machiavel to outwit," said Margaret, smiling.

"I should have less scruple if we *were* opposed to one," rejoined De Nevailles:—"I confess my only regret springs from the *necessity* of ejecting De Cœuvres and his fair daughter, who live at D'Usson as a natural home."

"Nay, baron!" cried the queen, with emphasis; "do not fall into the weakness of our friend Guise—let us have no obstacle in the shape of courtesy—it would be out of season. Besides,

De Cœuvres is getting old; and though out of a sense of honour he may not resign, yet to quit the peaceable old man of a responsible and warlike post at a crisis of danger, would be felt by himself, after a time, as a blessing. As for Gabrielle, she would be nearer Paris at her own Château de Cœuvres; she would not remain long hid! I could ensure her admirers by scores, serious or frivolous, as she might desire."

"I am thoroughly convinced," said De Nevailles.

"I feel also the hospitable treatment of the marquis," cried the Queen of Navarre; "but he has absolved the obligation by his foolish advances. He has had the folly, as you may perhaps have noticed, of addressing me with more courtesy than becomes his rank or mine."

"It will work to our own ends," replied the baron; "and your majesty must bear the ridicule."

"Envoy like!" exclaimed Margaret, "you look only to the result! Not a word of pity for the inconvenience I suffer."

"You are a daughter of Catherine de Medicis!" replied the baron.

"Pomini too is as assiduous as the marquis," said Margaret, without replying to what was both compliment and reproof;—"he may be of use to us!"

"The seneschal, though vain, ignorant, and servile, is not the fool which his conduct would declare him to be," rejoined De Nevailles, "for he has his own purpose to serve evidently. He can be made to declare for us with a little management, though we must take care to sift out and flatter his own cherished ends—for the wretch is selfish."

"So you would deprive me of an humble slave, baron," cried the Queen of Navarre; "his servility, according to your explanation, is not admiration, but interested selfishness."

"The very same," replied the baron; "though I know not what his mouth is opening for. But at any rate we will drop into it a tempting bait."

"Have you discovered the reason why my good consort made pretence of blockading D'Usson?" asked the queen.

"I cannot tell—it is beyond my conjecture," replied the baron. "When I left him to travel to Avignon, he had no such foolish idea. The site of his late encampment was pointed out to me by the marquis—I will show it to your majesty!"

They walked to the parapet of the terrace; and De Nevailles was pointing out the distant position which the King of Navarre had occupied, when their attention was arrested by observing Pomini loitering on the battlements below.

As soon as the obsequious seneschal beheld the consort of Navarre, he left the silent company of the sentinels for the more genial presence of Margaret; and soon reached the terrace, approaching her with his usual bows and affected steps.

"We have disturbed your contemplation, Monsieur Pomini," said the Queen of Navarre; "your brow was as thoughtful as though you had been governor of the fortress. Care will soon cover your forehead with wrinkles—I thought you had been wiser."

"Yet I do assure your majesty," said the pleased functionary, "that I am not in the same awful dilemma as our governor."

"And whence originates his trouble?" asked the queen; "has he repented of pardoning your error?"

"Why," replied Pomini, smiling, "I do not know how he should be troubled. It is his custom at this season of the year to visit his lands in the south, to look after his hay-harvest. He goes there twice a-year—the second journey to garner up his corn, or remove it to D'Usson, as may happen to be most prudent; but at present he does not know whether to go or stay."

"Does he fear Navarre?" cried De Nevailles.

"O! no!" replied the seneschal; "the King of Navarre being in the province would not hinder his journey. The cause of the dilemma is nearer home; he does not like to leave his guests."

"Then propose to him that you go instead," said the baron, who was disposed to fathom still deeper the character and motives of both governor and seneschal.

"*Ma foi!*" cried Pomini, in a natural tone, and laughing the while, "that would never suit monseigneur: he would fret himself to death with the apprehension of being cheated of part of his harvest."

"Then persuade him to travel thither without delay," said Margaret, "and threaten, if he waver, that you will start by yourself; it will alarm his avarice:—does he put confidence in you?"

"More than in others, though less than honesty deserves," replied Pomini.

"It is a pity he should suffer through us," cried the queen; "and if he have such a dislike to being absent from D'Usson, let him take as many of his garrison as he can spare. Soldiers are mowers by profession, and would work as quick as magic."

"That has been his custom," observed the seneschal; "but the Huguenots are in Auvergne."

"They would not attack the residence of their chief's consort," said Margaret; "neither would the gallant chief himself annoy his fugitive wife, who has been forced by the enemies of her house to fly here for safety. His nature is too noble to behave so unkindly."

"Bravo!" thought De Nevailles to himself, "she now equals her mother."

"D'Usson," continued the royal diplomatist, "would laugh to scorn the artillery of all France. It is impregnable, save to the ingress of the birds of the air."

"Your majesty speaks most wisely," said Pomini; "I will persuade monseigneur the governor to go to his estate.

"It would please me to observe your own skill and conduct in command of the fortress," observed the Queen of Navarre, with a most gracious look:—"I have conceived great hopes of you."

"I should hold my power during his absence," said Pomini, bowing and blushing at the compliment, "at your majesty's will to do as you pleased with me."

"We must take care," said De Nevailles to himself, "that fate obliges you to hold this promise good—it shall soon be put to the test."

"Your name is new to me," said Margaret, speaking to the seneschal in her most winning tones; "but though unknown at court, your manners, I am sure, would have sway, were you once placed there."

This was spoken carelessly, and without any premeditation, as the queen had not, in truth, discovered the main-spring of Pomini's moral being. But the light which flashed from his eyes at these words was not unnoticed by the sagacious woman. She continued to ply him in the same strain, while De Nevailles, who had been watching intently to catch a glimpse of the master-thought which guided the conduct of the seneschal, seconded the policy of the princess with a series of questions and remarks which cut across and laid bare the inner machinery of his mind, with its secret motives, its impulses, and aspirations.

He was in the hands of skilful operators, who left him no chance but in a free and candid confession, to which point he was brought and cajoled by the flattering promises of the artful queen. But the citadel of his fidelity, whether weak or strong, was wisely left for another *coup d'état et d'armes.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

Charmante Gabrielle,
Percé de mille darts,
Quand la gloire m'appelle
A la suite de Mars,
Cruelle départie!
Malheureux jour!
Que ne suis-je sans vie,
Ou sans amour!

Partagez ma couronne,
Le prix de ma valeur;
Je la tiens de Bellone,
Tenez-la de mon cœur.
Cruelle départie!
Malheureux jour!
Que ne suis-je sans vie,
Ou sans amour!

HENRI QUATRE.

THE Marquis de Cœuvres was indeed smitten with the charms of his royal guest; the old courtier, who had figured at the Louvre in the reign of the first Francis—who had subsequently retired from a life of gayety to devote his time to the education of an only daughter—and who had since been called from retirement to take charge of a fortress of the highest importance as a retreat and place of refuge, had not acquired wisdom sufficient to guard him against a superannuated passion. Had he brought to mind ever so slightly the experience acquired during three reigns, that old men in love are only countenanced by the objects of their devotion to make use of them either to their destruction or loss of honour, he would have suspected the favours of Margaret, who smiled upon his airs of gallantry, and concealed her contempt of his folly.

Until the arrival of the Queen of Navarre his mind had been gradually becoming uneasy at the change in the conduct of Gabrielle, who, as he imagined, and it remains to be seen with what truth, was neglecting her filial attentions to nourish a secret feeling to which he was a stranger.

But when the Queen of Hearts and Navarre became a denizen of the aerial D'Usson, the marquis forgot his daughter in watching the footsteps of his royal visiter.

It had been, as Pomini explained to the guests, his custom to visit his estates twice every year, and on these occasions the greater portion of the garrison accompanied him to gather in the hay or corn harvest, according to the season of the journey. But he was now in a dilemma. On one hand was the captivating Navarrese queen, with her ready smiles and unseen treachery; on the other his harvest, the accounts of the steward of the estate, and not least, his invariable custom,—the latter an influence all-powerful with an old man. But there was still a wavering of resolution; a fear of offending the queen—of leaving D'Usson under the care of an arrogant underling like Pomini, who he doubted not would give himself the airs of royalty itself during his absence. The alternative of sending the seneschal to clear accounts with the steward was equally horrifying; Pomini was not dishonest,—he would have spurned such a paltry crime as a sure blot in his anticipated escutcheon; but of this feeling the marquis was ignorant, and saw only the meeting of two rogues and its probable consequences.

He was in this state of mind when the vain chamberlain, instructed by Margaret, endeavoured to conquer his irresolution, by offering his own services in lieu. This tender, which was made more earnestly than characterized the usual deportment of the seneschal, roused the suspicions of the old man, and determined him that Pomini should stay at home.

His choice decided on, Jean la Roche, with three-fourths of the slender garrison, was ordered to prepare for marching by night-fall, as it was the intention of the governor to conceal his departure from D'Usson, lest intelligence might be conveyed to the Huguenots, who, it was reported, were still in the northern part of the province.

"Pomini," said the marquis, after he had reiterated his instructions to the seneschal; "let me not have to reproach you on my return for your neglect of my authority. Do not fancy yourself governor here, and dance her majesty over the castle as though you were a grand seigneur. I have told the Queen of Navarre, in the hearing of her jesting secretary, who I see is much amused with your absurdities, to consider herself as mistress of D'Usson, and to treat you according to your proper station."

Pomini, who longed to see his master, as the neighbouring valleys were called, *sous* D'Usson, promised compliance.

"Now, Jean la Roche," cried the marquis, mounting an idle and well-fed steed, after waving his hand to Gabrielle and the visiters, who stood on the balcony over the door of the

inner court, "you are ever grumbling at your confinement. Let your comrades have a specimen of your energies. Our road is free from the enemy, but I know not but that they may have left spies abroad; to-morrow's sun must see us safe beyond pursuit!"

"Ah!" said La Roche, whispering to Robert the recruit; "that is not the way Marshal de Biron used to talk to us—but it matters not how a commander speaks to soldiers going to make hay for an avaricious old man!"

The marquis and his troops were certainly favoured by the night, which was as gloomy as they could have wished; and they left the castle to the care of the exulting Pomini, who joyfully shut the gates upon the old governor and his suspicions.

Margaret was too much agitated to retire to rest; her mind was busy with its long prepared scheme; the moment seemed at hand for its execution, and she summoned De Nevailles to her council.

"Baron!" exclaimed she, on his approach, "we have rid ourselves of De Cœuvres! Shall we not open our views to Pomini? He is half prepared, by his own hopes and our promises, to join us—a word more, and he is our own!"

"But how shall we behave to the Lady Gabrielle;—how broach our intention to her?" asked De Nevailles.

Margaret had never suspected the attentions of the baron to the fair daughter of the governor, or this sympathy at an untimely hour would have called forth all her anger.

"What! you do not like to face her in my cause," cried the Queen of Navarre, laughing; "but remember, my fate is linked with the fate of Emilie—her fortunes are my fortunes—her destiny is my destiny. At the Louvre you professed yourself desirous of passing through fiery ordeals in her service;—your friendship has been accepted, monseigneur!—you are, indeed, our friend. When Pomini, with the assistance of our servants, shall place the keys of this fortress in my hands, will you not oblige me by telling mademoiselle that for the future the Marquis de Cœuvres may be hay-making all his life?"

"I will summon Pomini instantly!" said the baron, leaving the saloon for that purpose. "What rare creatures women are to make us ashamed of our weaknesses," muttered De Nevailles, as he passed along the corridor:—"No flinching—no delay—no absurd kindness or courtesy to which we fools are subject! I hope the gentle Emilie will prove of this spirit, or the chances will be against me with a meek partner. I am

glad her anger is so lasting; if she would only knock down a page in her fury *à la Montpensier*, my good fortune would be placed beyond a doubt."

The seneschal was not more surprised than pleased at the request of the baron to accompany him to a secret interview with the Queen of Navarre. In the interval, Margaret had prepared herself for her spiriting. When her expected guests entered the saloon, she was observed looking earnestly through the window at the darkened night. De Nevailles approached her with the calmness of one accustomed to intercourse with royalty; Pomini could not keep pace with him, nor indeed could any one in his place, who bowed at every second step.

"Pomini!" exclaimed the queen, turning round, and exhibiting a fierceness of expression, and speaking in a more determined tone than the seneschal had ever witnessed in a lady of rank.

The incipient L'Isle du Marais stopped short.

"Are you not discontented with your present rank in this castle?" continued Margaret.

"Very much so," replied the surprised Pomini; "I may tell your majesty that I am in a wrong position in the world—I am in an intermediate condition—worse than slavery."

"I am aware of it," rejoined the queen; "you are nothing, when you deserve to be something. Do you dare climb to a nobler elevation?"

"I would rub the skin off my limbs to do so," answered the wondering seneschal, who was, however, determined to chime in closely with her majesty's questions.

"To what extent does your conscience stretch—in plain words, how far would you go to attain your object? Speak boldly, and quickly too—for I am burning with impatience."

"I would, in the first place, be a credited gentleman of letters-patent," replied Pomini, without taking the least time for pausing;—"and I would go as far as my escutcheon would cover my actions."

"Well said!" cried the queen:—"how are you affected towards the marquis?"

"If I were to become a gentleman, I should feel myself forced to call him to account for his abuse of me, though, in my subordinate capacity, I am willing to confess he takes no more than a passing heed of my misdoings, and is fond of my society," replied the seneschal, wondering what more was in store for him.

"Do you expect your letters-patent through the influence of the governor?" asked Margaret.

"I did a season ago," answered Pomini; "but if your majesty will excuse my boldness, and a reflection unpleasant to your ears, I should say that the King of France will very soon be in no condition to grant them; and then my long-expectant hopes will be left to the mercy of his great enemy. I have heard your royal brother will be deposed."

"He will not suffer that degradation," said the Queen of Navarre, speciously; "he will resign the throne to save disgrace."

This declaration at once crushed the hopes of the seneschal.

"Emilie should be here to receive a lesson from her protectress," thought De Nevailles, looking upon the downcast Pomini.

"If one bridge were to break," said Margaret, "would you throw yourself in despair into the stream, or look above and below for another passage?"

"I wish to be a gentleman of letters-patent," replied Pomini: —"I would prefer being *ancien gentilhomme*, but that I know to be impossible."

"You seem to understand me," said Margaret.

"Your majesty would be more intelligible if you could point out the bridge by which I am to pass the stream of ignoble life," retorted the imboldened seneschal.

"I will!" replied the Queen of Navarre;—"the king my husband, whose forces are in this province, and whose counsellor this gentleman is, shall erect a territory for you in any province of his dominions; you could not sit more honourably than among the ancient noblesse of Navarre and Bearn. Say! monseigneur!" continued Margaret, addressing the baron, "is not my proposal practicable?"

"You see before you, Monsieur Pomini, the Baron de Nevailles," said the baron to the astonished seneschal; "all France credits my influence with the King of Navarre, and I promise you that you shall have your letters-patent."

"But my lands are in Languedoc," exclaimed Pomini, "a branch of the Rhone encircles my corn-fields—and the old seigniorage was L'Isle du Marais. I would be called by that name."

The baron turned, apparently to adjust the belt of his sword, but in reality to conceal a smile, which he found it impossible to repress.

"You shall have any name you please in Navarre, and if

my power reaches as far, in France," said Margaret,—"but now for the service—for you must be aware that all honours are held by such a tenure."

Pomini bowed, and resolved to trust to fortune for the Languedoc creation.

In a few words, the queen narrated the quarrel with her family and the deprivation which she had suffered from the non-payment of her father's legacy; her determination to rescue whatever was available out of the wreck of the fortunes of the Valois dynasty; and that her choice had fallen on the Château D'Usson, which, once in her possession, could never be retaken.

"Let me be Chatelaine D'Usson," exclaimed the queen, in an impassioned tone, "and you shall be all that Navarre can make you, and the governor of the fortress."

Despairing as Pomini did of the re-establishment of Valois, and fascinated also with the offers of the princess, who gave him no time for reflection, he closed with the terms proposed.

"Is the Lady Gabrielle to reside here?" asked the seneschal, during the discussion of the steps necessary to be taken.

"Mademoiselle d'Estrées has many friends, I perceive," said the queen, darting a sly look at the baron. "She may live at D'Usson if she so desire it; but I can scarcely believe she would wish to dwell elsewhere than with the marquis."

The night was chiefly spent in preparing for the morrow's *coup-de-main*. While Margaret was left to gather what rest she might in the few eventful hours which intervened before the moment selected for striking the blow, De Nevailles, Pomini, and Antoine, to whom the plot was communicated, and who entered into it with all the zeal of a Gascon, repaired to the armory, and having selected arms and armour sufficient to equip the servants of her majesty and of the baron, which was all the force the confederates could bring into the field against the remnant of the garrison, they proceeded to visit the battlements, to examine every point available for resistance or offence.

This survey completed, there remained only to arm their adherents and wait patiently till the early parade, the hour chosen for the *coup d'essai*.

"You will gain more in one day, Monsieur Pomini," said the baron, "than you have done in all your life beside."

"And yet," replied the seneschal, "I shall have to wait with uncertainty for what I have toiled for from my youth."

This reply was dictated by a lurking remonstrance of con-

science, which would not be altogether quieted; but with such a man as Pomini, the "still small voice within" was obliged to be circumspect; it durst not attack its master openly on the score of infidelity to the governor;—that was an admitted crime, and one contemned also by the ambitious seneschal, who would allow of nothing to stand in the way of his long cherished hopes; but the monitor, resolute not to give up the contest without a struggle for the honour of human nature, learned a lesson of art, and whispered its owner that he was sacrificing his character and reputation fruitlessly—that all would be lost, without the recompense for which he had surrendered up his honour being gained. This was a most reasonable twinge; one to which no man could object; and gave birth to the dissatisfied speech in reply to the triumphing assertion of the baron.

But Pomini was too far gone to recede; he neglected the monitor by feasting in imagination on the flattering prospects held out to his ambition; though his features still retained a moody expression, which gave great alarm to De Nevailles.

By break of day the servants of the visiters were perfectly instructed in the venturous part they had to perform; nothing remained but to wait patiently till the signal was uttered for their active co-operation with the chiefs of the plot.

Margaret was seated in her chamber when the beat of the drum summoned the little garrison to the inner court of the fortress. Gabrielle had not shown herself to her visiters since the previous evening. Emilie was avenging herself on the baron by avoiding his presence; and the queen sat alone, her trembling frame and anxious countenance unobserved of any one.

It was the crisis of her fortune, and she sat listening to catch the expected sounds of contest or triumph; her friends were so few,—scarcely six or seven able hands against three times their number,—that she almost dreaded to hear of the result; though ever and anon, as her spirit rose high, she felt an inclination to rush to the scene of action, and cheer on her friends to victory.

She listened in vain. No sound broke upon her ear; neither of tumult, of fire-arms, nor the cries of combatants; all was as still as on ordinary occasions. After a while the very repose became alarming; she imagined that her friends had despaired of success, and given up the attempt.

This idea was worse than the contemplation of defeat; she could bear it no longer, and rushed to the door to quiet or confirm her distracting fears. But the appearance of Lisette, with

looks indicative of alarm, checked her intention, and she staid to question the girl.

"What has frightened you?" said the queen, in a hurried voice.

"Antoine!" replied the waiting-maid of Emilie, after a pause, in which it seemed doubtful whether she was not inventing a reply.

"Antoine!" exclaimed Margaret; "but you need not have feared him—he is one of our friends."

"That is just what he said," rejoined the girl; "but he put his arm round my waist, and said my foot was the prettiest in D'Usson—and so I ran away."

Margaret turned away in a rage at being thus baffled in the object of her inquiry; but a moment's consideration brought her again to the examination of Lisette, who stood in doubt whether to address her majesty.

"What, still in terror," cried the queen, "because you were told of the beauty of your feet! Has the garrison mustered this morning?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Lisette, dropping on her knees;—"pray forgive me! Antoine put all that out of my head!"

"Put what out of your head?" said the queen, almost phrensied.

"What I saw—and what monseigneur desired me to tell your majesty," replied Lisette, frightened at the queen's anger: "he has taken every thing prisoner, and is afraid to leave them till he—till he knows whether the old soldiers will be quiet."

"Rise!" exclaimed the agitated princess; "let me hear what you know of this."

Lisette, who had been thrice frightened,—first, with the hostilities between the queen's party and the garrison; secondly, with Antoine, who overtook her in her way to the queen's chamber; and lastly, with the apprehension of her majesty's anger, for not thinking of her message in place of other matters,—was not in a condition to relate a succinct narrative of the adventure; but Margaret was enabled, by a series of questions and replies, which we need not detail, to glean the following particulars:—

It was the daily amusement of the female domestics of the fortress to be present at the review of the garrison, to enjoy a laugh among themselves at the old soldiers. Lisette, who happened to be one of this merry company, observed the troops march into the court-yard, where Pomini was waiting to inspect them. After the usual evolutions had been gone through,

the seneschal ordered the men to pile their arquebuses;—this manœuvre performed, they were marched to the opposite side of the court. Pomini then addressed the garrison, and in the course of the harangue informed his brave troops that since the departure of the governor, the Queen of Navarre had thought it necessary to increase their ranks, and had in consequence armed her own servants.

"You shall see," said Pomini, "what a gallant band they are!"

Hereupon he ordered the drummer to beat his tambour; it was the signal for the entry of Antoine and five confederates, armed with arquebuses and lighted matches, which are, as our readers may know, coils of cord saturated with a mixture of alcohol and other inflammatory agents, through which process the cord burns with a slow fire, and may be carried, even in a cap on the head, without danger of the fire being extinguished ere the coil is all consumed. The little battalion took a station opposite the garrison, standing between it and the piled arms. The Baron de Nevailles entered the area alone, as his sense of the ridiculous would not have permitted his marching at the head of the arquebusiers with all the gravity essential to a commandant placed in such critical circumstances. He took his place by the side of Pomini.

The seneschal then informed the wonder-struck troops, that the second and new battalion were desirous of placing the affairs of D'Usson on a surer footing; that they were convinced that harmony would never prevail in a fortress where the power, instead of being consolidated in one authority, was shared between chiefs of, perhaps, very opposite opinions on matters of policy. A reform was in consequence much wanted. The second battalion, anxious that peace and subordination should prevail within the rocky limits of D'Usson, and that they should be on good terms with their veteran brethren, had resolved on proclaiming the Queen of Navarre chatelaine of D'Usson, sole commandant of the fortress and garrison; and they invited their comrades to join them in the proclamation.

This harangue, which was delivered by Pomini in a tone partaking now of fear and now of boldness, was listened to by the garrison with astonishment and alarm. They appeared panic-struck, and looked at each other and then at the arquebusiers in dismay, till an old veteran suddenly waved his arm, and uttered a shout of "*Vive De Cœuvres! Vive le gouverneur!*".

The seneschal turned pale; the fear of the governor's ven-

geance entered his soul, and he looked at De Nevailles for advice; the baron whispered a few words, and placing his hand on Pomini's shoulder, gently pushed him forward.

"I had forgotten to say, soldiers," continued the would-be Lord of L'Isle du Marais, in an abrupt tone, the consequence of his fear, but which sounded like decisiveness, "that the battalion of her majesty have come to the resolution of shooting every one who utters seditious cries within the precincts of D'Usson. The veteran battalion will, I am sure, agree with their brethren in the necessity of this ordinance; and that the sentence should be put in execution within five minutes from the commission of the offence."

The poor remnant of the governor's troops were quite at a loss what to do; they found themselves deserted by their officer, upon whom they had placed reliance, and thrown defenceless into the breach of danger unarmed. The cry of the old soldier now fell powerless on the ears of men taken by surprise, without arms, and threatened with destruction from the fire of their opponents.

De Nevailles, perceiving their irresolution and wavering, and being anxious that the *coup-d'état* should terminate amicably—as an onset might have given men driven to desperation a chance of victory after the first charge, which would have left him still twice his own number to contend with had every shot taken effect—stepped forward, and in a calm voice explained the cause of the Queen of Navarre's assumption of the command of the fortress; and that she would continue to hold it until her brother had satisfied her just demands, or ceded its possession as an equivalent, which latter alternative would no doubt be preferred, as money was scarce in the royal treasury.

These and other persuasive reasons formed the theme of his address, which had for its object not only the possession of the fortress, but to gain the good opinion of the veterans by showing them that Margaret had not commenced a violent proceeding without just ground for what she had done and attempted. On the other hand, he explained to them that if they refused to obey the authority of the queen for the space of one year, till the quarrel with her brother was settled—or to march out of D'Usson instantly, without arms, which would be surrendered to them in the valley, as the queen did not wish to expose brave soldiers to the disasters which might accrue to men in a defenceless state and in times of great trouble, he and his servants, with the aid of the seneschal, would not quit

the court-yard till one party or the other was completely *hors de combat.*

This speech produced the desired effect, and a negotiation immediately took place; which, while pending, De Nevailles espying Lisette, took her aside and sent her to the Queen of Navarre, desiring her royal presence at the balcony; at the same time he despatched Antoine to look after Roquelaure, that his reverence should appear with the queen, and do away with any impression which might exist of Huguenot heresy being mixed up in the change of masters at D'Usson; and this stroke of policy—rather eccentric and fanciful, as were many of the baron's actions—he judged the more necessary, for though Margaret was esteemed a sincere Catholic, and moreover a good friend to the church, his own name was a firebrand among the zealous partisans of the olden sect, and might bring the queen's ulterior motives into suspicion, not only with the troops of De Cœuvres, but even with Pomini and the household.

After a little delay, the Queen of Navarre, accompanied by the colossal Cordelier, appeared at the balcony to receive the homage of the united garrison. Her own partisans were enthusiastic in their cries; but the veterans took off their caps and saluted their future mistress, without, however, any verbal demonstrations of respect. Margaret, who had been in the mean time joined by De Nevailles, addressed her new adherents, thanking them for their allegiance, and saying that she accepted of their services till the negotiation with her brother had terminated.

A large supply of the best provisions the fortress could afford, together with a bag of crowns, distributed among the garrison, completed *la journée D'Usson* in a manner satisfactory to most concerned.

So quietly had the transfer been effected, that Mademoiselle d'Estrées was ignorant that she was a prisoner in her own pleasant home of many a year. When Margaret and her friends left the balcony, De Nevailles, after congratulating her majesty on her splendid acquisition, said:—

"We must, as soon as possible, procure recruits to leaven the morality of the veterans, which is very defective; I think it very probable that the presence of the Lady Gabrielle might stir them into rebellion. D'Usson is not our own till the veterans are outnumbered."

"By St. Francis!" said the monk, who had not been made privy to the exploit till summoned to attend Margaret on the balcony;—"what will your royal mother say to this?"

"Her voice will have lost its strength ere its echoes gain the summit of D'Usson," replied the Queen of Navarre; "but there is an immediate task for either you or the baron to perform. Mademoiselle d'Estrées must meet the difficulties of her changed condition. Who will be the herald?"

"The Baron de Nevailles," cried Roquelaure, who did not relish being an unwelcome messenger, "had better convey the bitter news to her in the words of a minstrel-poet—such as I have heard them reciting to each other: the sweet language of a troubadour will soften the ill flavour of the intelligence."

"Here is profanity!" cried the baron, who was vexed with the monk's speech for more reasons than one:—"Are not the consolations of piety and religion meetest for one in captivity? Would you mock the imprisoned bird with the notes of a gay carol? In what holy sanctuary have you been trained, father, that you dare avow your preference for profane canticles? Ay! and to offer them to a sick heart—the while forgetting your holy office!"

"Heard them reciting to each other!" said Margaret to herself; "and De Nevailles betrays ill temper! I must question Emilie—it was then, in truth, a quarrel I witnessed. Father!" continued she, no longer leaving the office to their choice, "explain to Mademoiselle d'Estrées the position in which she now stands in d'Usson!"

"I do not know it myself rightly," replied the Cordelier.

"Then say any thing you like," rejoined the royal chatelaine of D'Usson.

There was no appeal from the decision implied in this remark; so the monk, without more ado, commenced his pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of D'Usson. Gabrielle had not been of late an early riser; not through idleness, as those could aver whose office it was to supply the fuel of her lustres. Midnight oil was consumed undoubtedly; and as the lady had acquired the reputation of learning, her servants shook their heads and said that the fair chatelaine would kill herself with study; that she was already looking very ill.

When Roquelaure sought admittance to her reception-room—one of a suite which overlooked the valley of St. Germain—the lady had just purposed visiting her guests, unconscious that they were now her jailers.

"You have come to reproach my want of courtesy, father!" said Gabrielle:—"I have wofully forgotten the duties of hospitality, to leave them to the mercy of the household—but I promise better conduct for the future."

"I wish she had rated me instead of this civility," said Roquelaure to himself; "I should have been better inclined to my ungracious task."

"You do not speak, Father Roquelaure," continued D'Estrées:—"Is her majesty ill?"

"What shall I say?" continued the monk, in his unheard soliloquy; "out with the truth at once, or give note of preparation?—Poor lady!"

He decided on the latter mode, saying, in a sorrowful tone—which at first drew a smile from Gabrielle, who could not help being struck with the incongruity of a lugubrious sentiment from such a tall, well-fed, and joyous-looking column of humanity—"Daughter! the rich and the poor are both alike subject to misfortunes! No destiny, however noble and ancient, is above their reach—even the princely Valois is a fugitive from his home!"

"It is as I feared," cried D'Estrées, in alarm; "the queen has been taken ill. You shake your head;—I hope she is not very ill."

"Not worse than either of us," replied Roquelaure; "my coming concerns yourself, daughter!"

"Ah! then the marquis has been taken prisoner—or perhaps he has met with a cruel fate—you are unkind to mock me with this suspense. I will know—and you shall see that I can bear my loss. Speak on, father!"

And Gabrielle, who was indignant at the circumlocution of the monk, triumphed over her fears, and eyed the Cordelier with such firmness that he took courage, and related the events of the morning.

D'Estrées heard the narrative in silence, and when the monk ceased speaking, he watched her countenance till he beheld a gleam of light flash across her features.

"Ah! by my injured father!" exclaimed Gabrielle, "we shall be avenged! The train was prepared by a just decree in anticipation—no longer do I feel remorse!"

"Revenge, daughter, is a most unchristian feeling," murmured the Cordelier.

"It is, father," replied Gabrielle, in a subdued tone; "and were you my confessor, it would fall to your office to impose a heavy penance on me; but I imagine the confessor of the Queen of Navarre will be saved such an unwelcome duty towards his royal penitent. I am indeed a poor mortal, and cannot feel either hatred or revenge without becoming criminal in the eyes of your reverence; but her majesty—as you

have just narrated to me—can hate her family, cheat them of their possessions, violate the laws of hospitality, and conduct herself, on the face of God's earth, as though all were her own, and morality an emanation of her own will, to be put aside at pleasure.—Yes! she can do all this, and receive the commendation of her confessor! Truly do they call her a divinity at Paris, since she is not subject to the penalties which fall on the heads of mortal women.—Nay, father—not one word of remonstrance! Only tell me this—am I to quit D'Usson before the marquis can know of my departure?"

"You do the Queen of Navarre and myself much wrong," exclaimed the confessor, writhing beneath the lash of the fair D'Estrées: "I knew not of her intent till success had crowned the attempt; and her majesty wishes only to place herself in a position where she can command justice. She has been a suitor—yes, a beggar—for that boon, too long."

"Then were I Queen of Navarre, or her secretary and counsellor—he whom you now call Baron de Nevailles," cried Gabrielle, with animation,—"I would not so have committed my good faith! Would it not have been worthier of a Valois, or even of a De Nevailles, whose name I have read of in old chronicles, to summon friends and adherents, beleaguer a castle in the open day, before God and man, and carry it by force of arms, in every way worthy of their ancestry? Are they not ashamed to show their faces? Will they dare meet my father—talk to him, the baron, with his visor up—or will he only survey his kind host through bars of steel? Why you, father, seem ashamed of your part."

"Daughter!" cried the humbled Cordelier, "the church and state are both obliged to act at seasons through expediency rather than doctrine. The ways of truth are straight, but obstacles are often thrown in its paths by the malicious, forcing the well-disposed into a crooked course. Look at the forked lightning launched from Heaven's hand! Is the hand crooked? Is it not rather the resistance—the evil in its path which it has to overcome—which forces it into an angular line? Look at the gentle spray, which grows under the care of the fair chatelaine in the garden of D'Usson—so near to Heaven! Hold it forth in your hand—look at the ends—how parallel! But the length between—how angular! a succession of crooked lines, like the forked play of the lightning! Here is but a type of human nature. You see the original design—the fair straight course of nature thwarted by evil, unseen but in its effects—you witness the result of the struggle—a perpetual effort to-

wards a straight career, and a continual involuntary divergence, producing the crooked spray! Such is poor human nature; and such it will be till He whom I serve, and who permits its sway, as a touchstone for the strength and beauty of his own creation, shall, when this dispensation is accomplished, will it from off the earth. But till then the struggle between good and evil will continue, and the human victim gasp out its respective colours, unceasingly conflicting, as the dying dolphin makes the waves reflect in turn every colour of the rainbow."

"O confessor! worthy of the Queen of Navarre!" exclaimed Gabrielle. "Then evil is beautiful."

"Nay, daughter," replied the monk, quickly; "but in this our mortal state it calls forth the hidden virtue of humanity. Had nothing but goodness and philanthropy reigned on the face of the earth, where could have been displayed the holy offices of charity? Where the divine offices which the lowly and good of heart of your sex displayed towards their Redeemer? Where his bright example—a lamp to the end of the world—and a glory for ever, but for the persecution of his cruel enemies? Had mankind never been afflicted, they would never have known their strength—had they never witnessed and never done wrong, their devotion would have lacked the depth of feeling which springs from a heart which has escaped perdition!"

"And you, father, looked like a guilty creature when you came here on your errand," said Gabrielle, whose anger had subsided beneath admiration of the enthusiasm which she had kindled in the monk.

"I have ever been a child seeking repentance and help to escape from a world to which I am chained!" replied the admirer of fattened capons and apologist of expediency.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The plot is laid: if all things fall out right,
I shall as famous be by this exploit
As Scythian Thomyris by Cyrus' death.

HENRY VI.

To the spectator from the valley, D'Usson with its gray towers reflecting the sun's beams, and its lofty basement rock, the centre of a panorama of romantic beauty, seemed the sure abode of happiness; but far from happy was the condition of the inmates. Gabrielle would not quit her chamber, lest it might be construed into a recognition of the queen's authority; she was resolute in holding herself as a captive, scorning, as she did, to be the guest of the arch-traitress of Navarre.

The victors did not feel themselves secure in their new possession till the temper of the garrison had been put to the proof against the old governor, whose return was daily expected; nor was it prudent for either De Nevailles or Pomini to leave the fortress in order to levy reinforcements, as the number of the queen's party was so small, that each of her friends might fairly account himself essential to her safety.

In this state of uncertainty and alarm affairs remained at D'Usson, till the trumpet of the marquis announced his arrival in the valley; never was heard a more fearful sound, though pealing in the ears of veterans, and also of one who had done good service in the army of his sovereign.

Half-way down the descent was a ruined tower, which had in the feudal era served as a defence to the winding path, and without the capture of which the gates of the castle were inapproachable to foes. It had been dismantled since the erection of the batteries which flanked the gate-tower, as a useless position. The thought flashed across the mind of the baron, that from this post three or four determined arquebusiers might keep at bay the whole force of the marquis; and what was of more importance, prevent him having the least communication with his former garrison. But on the other hand he dreaded a counter-revolution; to the practised eyes of the veterans, his absence would have presented a favourable opportunity of shutting him out, and so making their peace with De Cœuvres.

The possibility of such an error was not to be endured, and he made up his mind to stay within the walls, and allow the unsuspicious old noble to approach.

De Cœuvres was in excellent temper; the accounts of the steward and the produce of his lands were both gratifying; his soldiers had proved themselves willing assistants—and the double journey had been performed without encountering the troops of either of the adverse factions. The old marquis longed to renew his homage to the fair Navarrese queen, and again to sun himself in her smiles—an agreeable contrast to the scorching rays of Phœbus; but this pleasure was denied him.

"La Roche," exclaimed he, addressing the veteran, as the little band was toiling up the ascent; "the seneschal is too proud to come forth to greet us; and methinks the Queen of Navarre might have shown herself on the terrace—it would have made our welcome doubly pleasant."

La Roche did not reply; but when, after rounding a mass of rock, they came within view of the gates, and saw the portcullis lowered as though the fortress were in a state of siege, the old arquebusier uttered one long, deep—*Sacre!*

"By St. Michael! how is this?" exclaimed De Cœuvres; "that villain seneschal has been playing us some trick on purpose to amuse her majesty. He shall quit D'Usson ere sunset."

The marquis ordered his trumpeter to sound a parley; the rocks and valleys echoed the warlike notes, which, however, brought no friendly greeting from the castle; a sentinel threw from the gate-tower a packet, which Robert rushed forward to pick up. It was a declaration of the Queen of Navarre, setting forth her unsatisfied claims, and her determination to hold D'Usson till her demands were complied with, either by the King of France or her royal mother; it concluded with a regret for the show of hostilities displayed towards the marquis, but that whatever might be the good feelings entertained towards him as a French gentleman, yet as an officer of his majesty he could not, on any consideration, be permitted to enter the fortress.

"Do I dream?" exclaimed De Cœuvres, when he had finished the perusal of the document; "No! No! It is a conceit of the queen's secretary, in conjunction with that villain Pomini, to have a laugh against me!"

The marquis, however, looking a second time at the declaration, which was worded with all the accuracy of diplo-

matic care, shook his head. He feared he had been outwitted, but resolved to make another trial. A second parley was sounded, and Pomini made his appearance behind the portcullis, much afraid of his master's arquebusiers, whom in his just rage he might order to fire upon the unfortunate seneschal. As soon as De Cœuvres perceived his treacherous subaltern sheltered behind the iron-bars, like a prisoner in a cage, his mind again recurred to the idea of a meditated frolic.

Commanding the astonished soldiers to halt, he rode up to the gates; Pomini, though on the safe side, recoiled half a step in fear at his approach.

"When your game is over, Monsieur Jongleur," cried the marquis, suppressing his rage, "you will, I hope, allow our tired bodies a place of repose. This is the cleverest piece of pastime you have achieved since I took you into D'Usson. Have you no fear that we should catch up your wild spirit, and throw in a score of balls to show our sympathy?"

The calmness with which De Cœuvres uttered this speech was the result of a strong effort to conceal his vexation; but he was in that dubious state of mind in which a man finds it so difficult to act with the right feeling, not knowing whether he be made the subject of a joke or a piece of treachery, and unwilling that he should commit himself in the event of either alternative.

"As to fear, monseigneur!" replied Pomini, watching the eyes of the marquis, which were earnestly scanning the interior of the court, to ascertain who might be within hearing, "that ought to be mutual. The old culverins on the batteries are loaded with shot—and we might have tumbled monseigneur into the valley ere he could speak to us."

"Loaded with shot!—Shot for a salute!" exclaimed the marquis, in a voice faltering with apprehension.

"Shot for a salute! *Pardieu!* monseigneur! No! we have not changed the old customs at D'Usson!" rejoined the seneschal.

"Old customs! What and when mean you?" asked De Cœuvres, brooding a flood of revenge.

"I mean when monseigneur was governor of D'Usson!" replied Pomini.

"By the host of hell! you infernal thief!" shouted De Cœuvres grasping the portcullis with such violence as to shake the massive iron, "have I been feeding a viper—a reptile?"

"A viper—a reptile!" echoed the seneschal, indignant at

these appellatives, and little pleased at the slight titter which he heard from some one listening :—"When we meet again, I must be satisfied on that point."

"Have you let in the King of Navarre—you base, traitorous wretch? Let me hear the worst at once, that I may avoid what I loathe the sight of? Where is the Lady Gabrielle? I will not give up D'Usson till its walls are as low as the rock on which it stands! The king shall aid me—Satan shall give me power over his own—you devil-ridden scoundrel!" cried the marquis, in his impotent rage, as he grasped the bars of the portcullis.

The seneschal, full of remorse for his treachery, narrated a history of the transaction, in which he attempted to exculpate himself from all blame, save what attached to his frailty in being induced to listen to the siren persuasions of the Queen of Navarre, who, as he represented to De Cœuvres, had used her most cunning wiles to gain his acquiescence: and to her arts, he said, he had fallen a victim.

To have heard this confession of Pomini, one would have imagined him the most injured of men; a mortal who had fallen into the snare of an immortal enchantress;—a Circe from whom there was no escape! The marquis himself blushed; for he remembered his own infatuation, and trembled at the idea of the disloyal temptation to which he had been exposed.

The low voice in which the seneschal uttered the detail of his backslidings was believed by the marquis to arise from a consciousness of shame; but in reality it was to conceal the colouring of his narrative from those who he knew were listening to the conference.

"You can undo your crime, Pomini!" said De Cœuvres, still hanging to the portcullis in the act of listening to the seneschal.

"I dare not—I am at this moment watched—the queen's secretary has twice threatened to hang me on the terrace against your return, for pitying mademoiselle! They dread me as one would a pestilence," replied the plausible functionary.

"The meet reward of villany!" exclaimed the old governor. —"And my poor Gabrielle! a prisoner at D'Usson! I thank God, she will not even speak to the traitorous siren!"

A few moments' reflection pointed out the only course the marquis could pursue; he bade the seneschal bear his protest against the treachery, and to inform Gabrielle that he should

demand her on the morrow—and immediately left the gate-tower and joined his soldiers.

"Jean la Roche! and you, my brave friends!" cried he, "there has been foul treason at work—we must seek another home till I have matured my plans. I promise you we shall not have many hours pass over our heads ere we regain our own fortress. The garrison is not stronger than when we quitted it; and your comrades do duty through threats of instant death! Nay, resistance is useless now—we must submit to our fate, and call in subtlety to our aid against those lofty towers."

The marquis had much difficulty in persuading his men to submit to the loss of their citadel; but he at length induced them to retire, upon his promise of leading them to the attack at a point where art might successfully compete with strength.

"Gabrielle never leaves her chamber," said De Cœuvres to himself; "I would have sent for her to the gate, but others besides Pomini were within hearing."

The discomfited old noble returned to the valley, meditating a speedy revenge on his treacherous guests. It had given him great pleasure to hear that Gabrielle never quitted her ward of the castle, as it instantly struck him that a passage was still open to his entry.

On the side of the rock nearest to the valley of St. Germain *sous* d'Usson, over whose extent, bounded by the river Allier, the windows of his daughter's chamber overlooked, old tradition had reported an ascent to the castle practicable; and in truth, an escape by this means had been effected a century and a half previous, when D'Usson was a royal prison, for which the governor had been dismissed, as it was more than suspected he had permitted his charge to lower himself from a window of the fortress after the garrison had retired to rest; trusting that, as no trace of the exit of the prisoner was discoverable, no blame could attach to himself.

But Louis was too crafty himself to be cheated by his servants, and caused a strict investigation to be made; the result of which was the disgrace of the governor. Gabrielle, in searching through the archives of the royal château in quest of the venerable tomes of legendary tales and poetry in which she so much delighted, accidentally discovered a plan of the retreat of the prisoner, which had been drawn up by Louis's commissioner from the confession of the culprit, who obtained a remission, by that course, of the severe punishment which the monarch had threatened him with for his contumacious

silence. But little interest would have been attached to this document, had she not found that the room adjoining her sleeping chamber was lighted by the identical window out of which the former governor had lowered his friend to the rocks beneath.

She presented the plan to the marquis, who had curiosity enough—there might be a spice of caution in his resolve—to leave the fortress at night, and take the chart with him to the *Bois de Rigaud*, a wood at the foot of D'Usson, skirted by the little stream which encircled the rocky eminence. From this point he was enabled to trace, in a reverse direction, the track of the prisoner among the clefts and fissures of the mountain, till he arrived beneath the windows of Gabrielle's chamber, and within call of the sentinel. But the lofty wall of stone which arose in its massive strength from his feet, throwing into dark shade that portion of the mountain on which he stood, bade defiance to any hostile power not favoured by the inmates; and the old noble, after a cautious survey, returned by the same route, at the imminent peril of his limbs.

Though De Cœuvres kept his adventure secret from the garrison, yet he thought it worthy of mention in his next despatch to the secretary Villeroi, as an interesting historical fact, if nothing more; and the secretary, who happened at that season to be free from the alarm of a Huguenotic rebellion, after searching the archives of his office, wrote an answer to the marquis, stating that he had found a counterpart or copy of the plan, together with the examination of the delinquent. Thus ended the affair.

But now that De Cœuvres found himself so unexpectedly cheated of his commandancy, his thoughts reverted to the secret pass, and he instantly made up his mind to the attempt, of which we are about to relate the issue. So impressed was he with a certainty of success, that he was afraid to communicate with Gabrielle, lest suspicion should attach to the meeting, and her movements be in consequence closely watched.

He relied only on her being in her own chamber; on this were built all his hopes; and of her close, though voluntary confinement there, Pomini had acquainted him. Scaling ladders he had none—and Issoire was too far off, and besides, on the wrong side of the Allier—and he doubted also of the possibility of conveying such a machine to the foot of the tower. A few pebbles thrown skilfully against the window would, he was certain, bring the apparition of his daughter to his wistful eyes; or in case of failure of this stratagem, a long ash sapling

would reach the projection of the window—and Gabrielle, once aware of the quality of those below, it were hard if she could not find cord or other material wherewith a robust veteran like Jean la Roche, or sturdy youth like the more supple Robert, could climb up to the fortunate inlet.

Upon the marquis detailing his plan to the faithful old veteran, Jean was very angry that his master had omitted what he considered the chief point of the stratagem, which was to acquaint Gabrielle of his intentions.

"Say no more about it—it is now too late," replied De Cœuvres; "I loathed the sight of that tinker's son of Avignon, and was glad to escape."

"It is a wild scheme, by our Lady," said the knowing and presuming La Roche, "but not too much for a soldier to accomplish. But why does monseigneur trust to the Lady Gabrielle having what the hangman of Montfaucon only never goes without? By St. Genevieve! let us be prepared with a knotted rope or a cord ladder; we might have one to our hands good enough for a Barbary pirate by nightfall!"

"You are a clever fellow, Jean!" cried the marquis, "and shall have that villain's post."

"I say not a word of his dishonesty," thought the veteran; "but Marshal de Biron would have turned up his nose at such a coxcomb."

The night was favourable to their enterprise, which was of a character more toilsome and uncertain of success, depending on a slight contingency, than dangerous to a band of resolute soldiers. As they emerged from the *Bois de Rigaud* their beacon-star was blazing; from the western side of D'Usson, the light streaming from the chamber of Gabrielle might be seen by the peasant as he retired to rest, mayhap to dream of the lovely chatelaine of D'Usson, and, by the magic of sleep, fancy himself transformed into a lord worthy of her love. The marquis had not forgotten the route, though the few years which intervened had rendered him less capable of the toil; but the spirit of just revenge which excited his frame renewed his youthful strength to a degree which surprised those who had hitherto regarded their commander as an old worn-out court favourite, destitute of the leading characteristics of a soldier.

De Cœuvres relied upon his memory in tracing out the intricate pass among the rocks; but it was rather by the distant landmarks to be kept in view, than by looking at the path beneath his feet, that he expected to reach the summit. The

fortress, with its unconscious beacon-light, was soon lost as they wound round the masses of basaltic columns, which the elements, or the more violent convulsions of nature had laid bare to the view of the spectator, who dreaded the fall of the loosened and broken shafts above his head, which clung only with a lateral support to the descending piles.

At the termination of this ridge the memory of the old noble served him faithfully in directing his steps due north, himself and his followers scrambling along the steep sides of the mountain. He remembered distinctly, that after keeping this track a short distance—and that he was in the right course he felt certain from being opposite to the peak of a distant hill—he was to descend towards the valley, and again keep a northward track till he arrived at a ravine, and after passing its defile or mouth, to ascend the opposite steep with an upward course, till he arrived at the summit.

This was the sum of the treasured burden of his memory, but he unfortunately forgot that a little water track, which ran over a stony channel down the back of the mountain, ought to have been his guide downward. This he stepped over without notice, keeping an even and straight course till he unexpectedly arrived at the edge of the ravine.

"La Roche," said the marquis, whispering to the veteran;—"I have lost the path—we must go back—may Heaven, which abhors treachery, point out the true road!"

"Marshal de Biron never marched back if he had made an awkward movement," replied Jean, "he always cut through the difficulty."

Jean, who dictated to the marquis in his military office as much as Pomini had presumed on his indolence in the internal economy of the castle, without waiting for orders, commanded his comrades to halt. De Cœuvres and his deputy were on the brink of the ravine, while at intervals in the rear stood the arquebusiers, in the loose order of march, each with his arquebuse slung behind his back, and with rest in hand, which helped him at need as a staff to grope out the way.

"Comrades! look to your matches!" cried the veteran, addressing the men;—"let us have no mistake. Now, monseigneur!" continued La Roche, in a whisper to the marquis, "did you not cross this ravine?"

"By St. Michael! No! I recollect looking up its dark defile in my former track," replied De Cœuvres.

"And which path did you trace after you had passed it?" asked the old soldier.

"Along the steep to the summit!" replied the marquis, his eye fixed on the opposite ascent.

"Bravo! monseigneur! you have improved upon the engineer—this is a shorter cut!" rejoined La Roche.

"So it might be," said the marquis, doubtingly; "but how are we to descend? The moon affords light enough to show me that the cliff overhangs—and we must take a leap in the air if we prefer this route!"

This was an obstacle which La Roche felt convinced would have puzzled even Marshal de Biron; but Jean, nowise daunted, and like other professors, desirous of exhibiting his skill to an illustrious pupil, got down upon his knees and crawled to the edge of the precipice, and to his great delight espied, at a short distance below, a ledge of rock. The veteran, without more ado, arose, and calling out for his friend Robert to approach, pointed out the projecting shelf, and requested the young soldier to make the descent without delay, and there to await and assist his less active comrades.

Robert without hesitation accepted the challenge, not knowing but that it was the route marked out by the chief. The stronger end of the ashen-pole which they had brought with them was held by two of the soldiers even with the rock, and projecting beyond it several feet; Robert advanced boldly to the edge, and clinging with both hands to the ash, drew over his body; finding his feet touch the sides, he let go his hold, and slid down till stopped by the ledge. The first step of difficulty over, the remainder of the band followed his example, leaving the marquis and La Roche behind.

"Now, monseigneur," said the veteran, "it is your turn; and when you reach the bottom I shall drop the end of the pole and slide down—but do not forget to hold tightly below!"

The old noble having undertaken the expedition, was determined to proceed with it at any risk, and complied with the request of La Roche, who receiving assurance of the governor's safety, followed his own prescribed method; but the wood being slender at the top, broke with the weight of his body, and he fell among his comrades, crushing Robert, who was holding the pole. Both rolled off the ledge together ere their friends could prevent it, who were doomed to witness the distressing spectacle. If it had not been for the penalty of the fall, the descent of the two arquebusiers would have excited the mirth of their comrades; for the arquebuse of Jean, the foremost body, catching in the broken *debris* of the mountain, hindered for a moment his downward progress; but Robert,

who moved like a cylinder, rolled over his friend, and took the lead; while La Roche being dislodged by the shock, renewed his course in the wake of the recruit, till both were out of sight of the trembling marquis.

"There falls the best of soldiers," cried he in despair;—"I shall never see his fellow."

"What, not a friend go in search of him!" exclaimed one of the band:—"by St. Gregory, I'll find his body, if I have to roll myself."

And so saying the soldier commenced his awkward march, sliding and moving sideways alternately, as best suited the nature of the descent. The marquis and his troops followed the intrepid arquebusier. When they had nearly gained the bottom of the ravine, they heard to their astonishment the voice of the last veteran crying out—

"Have you brought the broken ash with you?"

"Curse the ash," cried the foremost soldier, "we came in search of you."

To the inquiries of his delighted commander, La Roche explained that both himself and Robert had been saved by the loose texture of the *débris* giving way beneath their bodies, which escaped with only a few bruises.

The opposite side of the ravine presented a work of toil, but of toil only; and they gained the broad back of the mountains without farther danger. The castle was now often in view, and encouraged by the light which shone brightly from the chamber of Gabrielle, the marquis and his band of adventurous soldiers assured themselves of success. But a new danger presented itself; they might possibly be seen by the sentinels, an event which would have destroyed all their hopes, and made useless all their labour. The idea of this fatal termination of the perilous march delayed their progress exceedingly; they used the utmost caution to hinder, as much as possible, the noise of their footsteps and the rattling of arms; but perseverance at length brought them, scathless and unseen, beneath the walls of the fortress.

The western side of D'Usson was in deep shadow, the moon being in the opposite quarter of the heavens; and beneath the walls of the castle the little band rested in darkness and safety. The marquis was in no mood to be interested by the lovely western hemisphere of mountain, stream, and valley, lit up with the smiling radiance of the lamp of night; sterner thoughts possessed his soul as he listened to the upbraidings of Jean la Roche for omitting to bring with him the ash-shaft.

"Even two feet short of its length," said the veteran, "it would have been as useful as Jacob's ladder to us."

"It cannot be helped," replied De Cœuvres, looking up at his daughter's window; "we must—but gracious heavens! what do I see? a ladder of rope! Has Gabrielle had a dream? —A miracle;—our wants anticipated."

Whether a miracle or an effort of human agency, both the marquis and La Roche distinctly saw a ladder of rope hanging from the window to the ground. It was no vision, for they ran forward and grasped it as palpably to their senses as any rope ever touched by human hands.

"By the holy Virgin," said Robert to himself, "this puts me in mind of the noise which I heard at night when on duty."

De Cœuvres trembled with an unknown cause of fear.

"Do you ascend, Jean," cried he, "I am powerless—we are betrayed."

"And that roll down the cliff has made me so giddy and light-headed, that I scarce know what I do except with a strong effort," replied La Roche;—"I would rather some one else made the attempt."

"Nay, Jean, I command you!" said the trembling noble, who was unwilling that any one but his most confidential subordinate should encounter the task.

The arquebusier was too good a disciplinarian to dream even of disobeying his orders; he took out his slow match, and affixing it to the lock of the arquebuse, which he again slung across his back, put foot on the ladder, and commenced the ascent. Step by step the veteran mounted till he was enabled to peer in at the open window. To his great astonishment he saw, or thought he saw, for he was not certain what influence the severe fall had had on his senses, Gabrielle seated by the side of a man in a rustic dress, but of noble features.

"There is no danger, Gabrielle," exclaimed the peasant, in a voice full of tenderness. "I wish there were—I would that the road to your lofty tower were beset with all the cooped up garrison of D'Usson. I have been so accustomed to gain delight through difficulties, that my happiness seems won too lightly."

"Umph!" muttered La Roche to himself, "then you did not cross the ravine."

"That a simple evening walk in Auvergne," continued the rustic gallant, looking upon her downcast face, and adjusting a string of pearls which had fallen over her brow, "should re-

store to my unworthy eyes such perfection!—Repeat again, Gabrielle, that you were pleased to see me—a lover never feels secure—he requires again and again that his mistress should assure him of his blissful destiny."

"By St. Genevieve!" said the bewildered arquebusier to himself, as he surveyed the scene—his head just peeping above the ledge of the window,—"I envy the fellow! to call the mountain path a simple evening walk."

"You are so suspicious that I shall be angry with you," said the beautiful girl, raising her eyes; "can I give a stronger proof than my courage in venturing to see you?—words are poor after this."

"And yet words, even angry words, from a sweet mouth, are rich and beautiful as precious gems," replied the peasant. "In passion, they are diamonds, brilliant and flashing—but in the divine mood of my Gabrielle, they come from out the sweet casket of her mouth, soft as pearls, reflecting a subdued and tender light, like her own love."

"Ah, I hear the marquis calling below," thought La Roche; —"ought I to speak to the lady or not?"

"I have good news, Gabrielle, which confirms what I before only glanced at," continued the peasant lover, "as a remote event, not to be accomplished in a day. But my friends at Rome have written to me to say, that his holiness is well disposed to my suit—perhaps out of revenge to my enemies, who, as you know, are at enmity with him. Our union may not be far distant."

"Mademoiselle," cried the arquebusier, who found it necessary either to return and explain what he had seen to the impatient marquis or address the lady; and as the object of the enterprise was uppermost in his thoughts, he chose the latter alternative.

The surprise of the lovers, whether real or but imaginary beings, may easily be conceived at this sudden interruption. The peasant was in a mighty rage, and drawing a concealed weapon, rushed forward to revenge himself on the intruder, who, despite his bruises and his giddiness, knew the point of safety, and glided down the ladder as cleverly as a Levant-skipper.

"You villain, what is the matter?" cried the excited marquis, collaring the veteran.

"Pardon me, monseigneur," exclaimed La Roche, dragging De Cœuvres aside and relating to him in a low hurried tone of voice what he had seen and heard.

"It is a lie," shouted the old noble;—"your fall has made you delirious."

"Then look for yourself," replied the offended arquebusier.

"I will!" retorted the governor, "and let you and your comrades follow me closely. D'Usson shall be ours in a few minutes."

Up sprung the enraged noble, and scrambling in at the window, he found himself in the presence of his daughter, who was sitting alone, and reading one of her favourite poets.

"Gabrielle," cried De Cœuvres, and they rushed into each other's arms.

La Roche, who followed close, both to vindicate his assertion and to stand prepared for the contest with the garrison, dropped into the chamber.

"You liar," cried the marquis, looking at him reproachfully;—"are you not convinced of your falsehoods?"

"Then ask mademoiselle why this ladder hung here," replied the stubborn arquebusier.

"Who was your visiter, Gabrielle?" asked the marquis, with a smile.

"Visiter?" cried the lady, returning his smile, "I was not so honoured! the queen threatened me with a visit to-morrow morning, ere you came to demand me—and to avoid her loathed presence, for I am sure I should be committed to the dungeons if I encountered her, I resolved to escape by the same route as the chevalier."

During this colloquy several of the governor's soldiers had entered the chamber, to the astonishment of its mistress; but ere she had time to ask her father the precise nature of his intentions, which she only guessed at, an unlucky incident occurred, which threatened the safety of all.

Lisette, who happened to be passing through the corridor, was alarmed at the noise in the chamber of the Lady Gabrielle, and listening for a few moments, heard the epithet of liar uttered in an angry voice, accompanied with a motion of the feet and other indications of violence, either threatened or offered.

Away ran the girl to De Nevailles with a story that a band of robbers were murdering mademoiselle in her chamber. The baron, after commanding her to raise an alarm, ran hastily to D'Estrée's quarter of the castle, and throwing open the door of her chamber, found himself in the company of the lady and some six or more of the supposed robbers. His attention being first attracted to Gabrielle, he did not scan closely the quality of her visiters.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed he, addressing her, "I have come in time for the safety of mademoiselle!"

"Thank the powers of hell," cried the marquis, in the bitterness of despair, "that have wrought against a good cause."

"The Marquis de Cœuvres!" exclaimed De Nevailles, stepping back in surprise.

"Ah! The governor! you traitor!" cried Jean la Roche, springing upon the baron so suddenly that they both rolled to the floor together.

But the veteran's good intentions were foiled by the arrival of the household. A rapid fight ensued, while the baron and La Roche lay struggling with each other in the midst of the skirmish, suffering more from the feet of the combatants, both of friends and enemies, than either foe from the grasp of his antagonist.

The battle would undoubtedly have terminated in favour of De Cœuvres, whose reinforcements were continually dropping in, had not De Nevailles, as he lay on the floor, perceived their mode of ingress. Letting go his hold of the veteran, he grasped the leg of one of the queen's servants, and was about to receive a cut in return, when his face was recognised by Antoine, who had just entered the scene of action, and interposed between him and the blind rage of the domestic.

"Never mind me and this old bulldog," cried the baron; "cut off the supplies which are coming in at the window. I'll choke him yet."

Antoine, who had performed gentle deeds at Coutras, was calm enough to perceive the bubbling stream of human life which poured in its tide to the assistance of the elder dynasty of D'Usson; and without more ado he ran to the darkened window and cleared away the encumbrance, by a single thrust between the cuirass and scull-cap of an arquebusier, who fell backward with a perforated throat. But the hydra of life was many-headed—this vitality, however, did not escape the quick eye of Antoine—and placing his sharp weapon between the ropes and the window-sill, he turned it edgeways, with the skill of an Atropos—and the crash among the rocks consummated the destiny of more than one of the adventurers.

Meanwhile the domestic of the queen, who in his hurry had been about to commit an irreparable error, repaired the fault by disengaging La Roche from his hold—and this was no easy task, unless the gordian-knot of life had been untied, which the baron would not permit. The entry of the garrison termi-

nated the contest, leaving the marquis, La Roche, and his followers, save two who had slipped off cunningly elsewhere, each without his human mask, which wore a death-like grin, a parting expression of escape—prisoners to her majesty the Queen of Navarre and its annexed principalities by divine grace, and chatelaine of D'Usson *par la sagesse humaine.*

"Fortune has not looked kindly on your attempt, monseigneur," said De Nevailles to the marquis. "You were, as the seneschal informed me, coming to D'Usson to receive mademoiselle. I cannot offer you the hospitalities of the château, for such I am sure you would spurn—neither can my presence be so welcome as before we parted. I will therefore leave you and your friends to the care of Antoine and the household, who will supply whatever your condition may require."

Saying these words, the Baron de Nevailles bowed to the marquis and his fair daughter, and left the chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Si en quelque séjour,
Soit en bois ou en pré,
Soit pour l'aube de jour,
Ou soit pour la vesprée,
Sans cesse mon cœur sent
Le regret d'un absent.

MARIE STUART.

On the following morning, De Cœuvres, with his fair daughter and their retinue, bade adieu to D'Usson.

The Queen of Navarre was now in possession of a fortress which, saving the action of internal treachery, might bid defiance to the best-appointed army which the age could bring into the field. But he who had been the chief instrument in its acquisition was the most unhappy of its inmates. The just resentment which Emilie had conceived at the supposed infidelity of De Nevailles was not of that transient nature which might be dissipated by a few words of repentance: it had been suffered to sink daily deeper into her spirit, till it alarmed and recalled the wandering lover to his duty—but only to receive a renewal of the reproaches which Margaret had heretofore interrupted.

Nor could subsequent contrition efface the impression which his estrangement had caused; the feelings of the youthful Emilie had been deeply wounded—she had zealously and tenderly hoarded up a treasure which had proved worthless. Deeds were not to be expiated by words in the heart of the *protégés* of the Queen of Navarre; her quick, though hitherto subdued and silent spirit, demanded a more convincing and atoning proof of repentance.

The baron in this dilemma scorned to appeal to Margaret, who was ignorant of the quarrel, or even of the grief which her fair charge could not always conceal, when the pride which sustained her in the presence of De Nevailles forsook her in his absence. Margaret had hitherto had but one idea, and eyes only for what related to it: Emilie was unnoticed by her protectress, though every action of the latter had its origin in her welfare.

In addition to the loss of her love, De Nevailles had the mortification of perceiving that his share in the seizure of the fortress was severely blamed by Emilie, as a dereliction of the honour of a gentleman, and as unworthy of his station.

"When the Marquis de Cœuvres lays his complaint before the king," said the lady, in reply to the pleading of the baron, "all France will condemn your conduct as a piece of treachery, not even redeemed by an act of valour."

"Why not add, in the same schooling spirit," retorted De Nevailles, stung with the charge, "that it was the loss of my faith towards yourself that brought about the loss of my honour?"

"I cannot complain of your forsaking one who has not even a name which she durst avow," replied Emilie, calmly; "but I dare suspect those declarations which have been proved insincere."

"May I not listen to a song from the mouth of any lady save yourself?" cried the baron, whose proud spirit, vexed that the influence which had made the friendship and gained the confidence of two queens should be lost upon a simple girl, was waxing wroth.

The lady did not reply.

"Has the Queen of Navarre," continued De Nevailles, "become so anxious to free herself from obligation as to require mademoiselle to impugn the character of her majesty's adviser and friend? If the violent assumption of this stronghold were so wide a departure from honourable action, will not discredit attach itself to the queen as well as her servant?"

"The Baron de Nevailles is not of the same faith as the Queen of Navarre," replied Emilie; "and his attaching himself to her service of itself will be deemed a desertion of his own party. To league with our priesthood in an act of so ambiguous a nature as the seizure of a château where he had been hospitably entertained, cannot elevate the character of monseigneur in the eyes of either his Huguenot brethren or those of my own faith. Her majesty has motives in extenuation which he cannot plead;—what would be only retaliation in the Queen of Navarre, may be accounted treachery in the Baron de Nevailles."

"Well, Emilie! you have been, as I wished, a mirror in which I might see the reflection of my own actions. The pure transparent brede is stained with the image of a monster, if, indeed, the mirror reflect truly; and this image I must hasten to dissipate. It never was my custom to endeavour to colour my actions with the fleeting hues of rhetoric;—good or bad, they must be judged of in an unbiased heart, for I scorn appeal!"

"I wish all hearts were biased towards you as mine is, that you might not be judged too harshly," replied Emilie; "yet I fear, my own partial verdict not being free from censure, your name will be breathed with disparaging freedom."

"A just notion!" said the baron, smiling;—"Yes! What a wretch I must be! When Condé hears of this seizure, she will compose a ballette to be named *De Nevailles at D'Usson.* It is the proper effort of the artist, when treachery and vice abound, to have one redeeming fount of humanity—one character free from stain, that his own ubiquitary nature may not unjustly be supposed to sympathize with disorder;—and that vice may appear more hideous by contrast. Such is Emilie at D'Usson! But whom can the deeply-skilled Condé procure to imbody this personification of virtue? Our friends of the Louvre are so much inclined the other way, that the princess must issue a proclamation to command the indispensable appearance of the fair lady herself, for none but Emilie can be her representative!"

"Adieu! monseigneur!" said the *protégée* of Margaret; "I promised to wait on her majesty this morning."

"Pardon my wandering," exclaimed De Nevailles, detaining her; "will no repentance convince you that my heart has never forsaken its early hopes? Has language no form for one deeply repentant, and—"

"If words could efface the impressions of actions, no one is

a greater master of the language than the Baron de Nevailles," said Emilie, interrupting him; "but such ought not to be their power—for your own sake it ought not to be so!" Saying this, the lady disengaged herself and left the presence of the baron, who remained motionless awhile.

"Well! well!" exclaimed he, after a pause, "it is very right that there should exist these guides to virtue in this world of ours. Guides! I beg pardon humbly,—I mean shrines of virtue. Let me examine closely into my behaviour. I met these two ladies wandering from their homes—indeed without a home—I escorted them hither—risked life and honour to place them in such a position that they might demand justice—as suing for it had been found useless labour—and behold! the younger, gentler being, turns round to upbraid me for my pains. It is ever thus—I am made the fool of others—toil for others—intrigue for others—fight for them—scarcely asking of myself whether the cause be good or bad—relying only on the warmth and generosity of my own feelings! And what has resulted from this course? It were idle to enumerate—but if I proceed in the same eccentric track—next month will find me paying my devoirs to Montpensier, or riding, lance in hand, at the right hand of Guise. It will never do. While acting for my own private welfare, I was humble, unambitious, abstemious, contented with the labour of exercise without reward, and charitable to my neighbours' failings. But I threw my services into the hands of the King of Navarre, and I immediately became a spy and a liar.—I do service to the Queen of France, and I become a minion and an adventurer, shuffling the text of expediency into every shape of usage and pretext;—and for her proud daughter and this girl without a name, I have rendered myself a traitor to the sacred rites of hospitality—I—who have hitherto thought of myself so honourably, that I might be trusted to walk through unguarded treasures—between the unbarred gates of my enemies, if they placed confidence in me! How miserably I am fallen off in my own esteem—and for what? To serve others with kindliness, which I have been fool, miserable, ignorant fool enough, to mistake for the impulses of honour and justice! By all that yet remains of good in me, I will never do another kind action, if I exist for ever on this lower world! I will now live for myself,—and I truly hope that my old virtues will return to me."

The baron was at this moment interrupted by a footstep. It was Lisette crossing the hall—he desired her to call Antoine,

as he had commands for him. To the astonishment of the servant, De Nevailles instructed him to have their horses ready for starting secretly from D'Usson within two hours.

The interval was employed by the baron in writing to the Queen of Navarre respecting the policy to be pursued towards her family if she should happen to negotiate with them; also towards the garrison and household of D'Usson, and on other matters connected with her fortunes. With Pomini, now governor of the fortress, he had a long conference, in which he recommended an increase of the garrison without delay;—in which labour the baron could not assist him, from his known difference of religious belief, which would have prejudiced the service in the eyes of Catholic soldiers.

The interview over, De Nevailles left the rock and its stronghold without seeing either the queen or Emilie. From the peasants in the vicinity he learned that the forces of Navarre were still encamped in the northern district of the province; but he was not in a mood to care either for friends or enemies: his thoughts tended homeward; and thither he directed his course, and arrived without accident at the Château de Nevailles.

CHAPTER XXX.

Ville de Blois, naissance de ma Dame,
SEJOUR DES ROIS, et de ma volonté.
RONSARD.

WHILE Duke of Anjou, and brother of the King of France, Valois had acquired the reputation of being the most accomplished prince in Christendom; but the acquirements on which this far-spread renown were founded manifested more brilliancy than solidity, and the deeds of arms with which Europe rung were confessedly the work of others, ostensibly serving under his command. It is easy for one of royal lineage to reap the praises of his countrymen—but to be really great, he must pass through an ordeal of labour or adversity, and surmount the difficulties which beset an earthly career by the efforts of unconquerable will. The energies of a man's mind are never

called forth till he has been trampled upon; genius may present her fairy picture, or raise her voice within the sanctuary of his breast, but she will never gain the mastery of his being till the world's pressure has either calumniated, humiliated, or stricken him with the harrowing prospect of poverty. Then the voice and the power within struggles for dominion—a conflict ensues—and the soul holds the outward man captive; the inspired ploughman forsakes his rustic implements and rushes to the mart of poetry; the mechanic seizes the pencil or the graver as the gladiator his sword; and he who has hitherto walked quietly in the ordinary paths of life, throws himself desperately, but with a charmed weapon withal, into the arena of human contention, and becomes demagogue, patriot, statesman, or man of letters.

Under the shadow of the power of the queen-mother Valois had lived in security; and the brilliant surface of his nature faded beneath the corroding influence of sloth and luxury, while his youthful enthusiasm, the voice of his soul, sunk into superstition and vagrant fantasy. But when he became an outcast from the palace of his ancestors, a fugitive from the power of a rebellious subject, his soul cast off the weeds of effeminacy; he awoke to a sense of his own manhood—his consecrated office—and the guardianship of the prerogative of his house.

For many days after the retreat from the capital he pondered deeply on his fallen condition, till at length he saw the path which might lead to victory, or at worst an honourable and desperate contest. Without seeking the advice of Catherine, who lingered at her hotel in Paris—without seeking to remonstrate with the protector, whom the Catholics now looked upon as their chosen king—he launched out the thunder of his policy with a vigour which startled as much as it delighted the queen-mother, who was heard to say, that for the future she must live apart from her son, as her presence smothered his natural capacity.

From Chartres, where the monarch had taken refuge, he issued a proclamation summoning a meeting of the States of the kingdom, to be holden at Blois, to take into consideration the unhappy state of affairs which distracted France, and to provide a remedy for the evils which oppressed it. When faction has reared its head and threatens to abolish the ancient laws and usages of society—when a bold rebel menaces the life and liberty of his sovereign—what defence so wise and politic

as an appeal to the whole nation, through the form of its most justly valued rights? To an assembly of the States, or *Tiers-Etats*, which was composed of deputies from the clergy, nobility, and burgesses of the kingdom, sitting in the presence of, and in consultation with, the monarch and the great officers of the state, he appealed for protection and a renewal of his kingly sway.

To such a summons Guise and his adherents could not with any shadow of reason demur; and what pretence, asked Valois of his counsellors, can the duke make for his illegal violence before the States, which exist only through the laws he has broken?

Such must have been also the nature of the protector's reflections, for though Montpensier was for treating the proclamation with contempt, yet the proceedings of her brother were greatly changed after it had been made public; he saw that he must not yet quit subtlety for a more open weapon—and so powerful were the reasons he alleged for his conduct, and so tempting the future course of policy which he planned for himself and his party, that even *Madame la Duchesse* succumbed—and the duke, as it were, joined issue with the appeal of Valois.

The tact and penetration of Guise were clearly manifested in his opposition to the headlong impulse of Montpensier, as every well-disposed Frenchman was pleased with the peaceful vista which the forthcoming concurrence of the States presented to his imagination; it was regarded as the panacea for every evil, and its advent looked forward to with eagerness.

Nor were the Huguenots less delighted with the prospect of order and security which the anticipated meeting of the assembly presaged, for they expected, through the disunion which existed between the royal party and the faction of the protector, to gain a consideration and importance which might entitle them, at the least, to the confirmation or renewal of the spirit of the many treaties of peace entered into with them, and as often violated by the Catholics.

Blois, called the City of Kings, from the circumstance of the palace having been chosen by the house of Valois as the scene of education of many of its princes, is situated in the province of Orleanois, and on the banks of the broad and picturesque Loire. From the Fauxbourg Vienne, on the southern side of the river, the city presents an amphitheatre of houses rising gradually from the banks to the highest elevation of the hill, whereon the

Cathedral tower crowns the whole. To the left is seen, at the remotest corner of the city, the gigantic Château de Blois, the favourite residence of the kings of France, and the object of their lavish magnificence.

If Blois had not been already famous, it would have gained celebrity from the condition which it presented previous to the opening of the States. The chief nobility and clergy of the kingdom were assembled within its walls, together with the burgess-deputies from every province of France,—while in its lordly and favoured castle, the king and his royal parent held their court, enlivened by the ample train of ladies of honour which it was the ambition and policy of Catherine to entertain. The streets were gay with the glittering dresses of the noblesse, thronging every avenue, to enjoy a freedom which the crowded old-fashioned dwellings could not afford to their new occupants.

The castle is situated at the north-west corner of the city, seeming at first glance to be beyond the wall, yet in reality connected with it, by a causeway cut in the rock. Entering by this avenue the spectator beholds in the outer court a noble gothic edifice, dedicated to St. Sauveur; passing by this token of the piety of the French monarchs, he arrives at the inner court, surrounded on every side by the lofty stories of the château, which, from the various orders of design displayed, might be compared to the façades of four distinct palaces brought into contact by magic. One angle presents a florid gothic structure of noble height, decorated with cognizances, devices, and armorial bearings, sculptured in stone; another,—a pile of Roman and Grecian designs intermixed, an architectural importation from Italy; while facing this elevation stands a solemn mass of old masonry, the dwelling of the ancient counts of Blois, who had need of a fortress as much as a palace.

It were an endless task to enumerate the inmates of this vast edifice; suffice it to say, that Catherine, full of smiles and gayety, was sojourning there with her moody son, who appeared to his friends to be labouring under the weight of a resolve too mighty for his energies. D'Usez and the Princess of Condé found incessant food for laughter in the awkward bearing of many a provincial noble and his gentle dependants, who honoured the *fêtes* of the queen with their presence. The Marquis de Cœuvres, a supplicant at the *Château de Blois* for the recovery of his commandancy and fortress, and a deputy

of the noblesse to the States, was, by favour of her majesty, lodged at the castle with the fair Gabrielle, who had not yet appeared in public. Margaret was not behindhand with the marquis; she had despatched Father Roquelaure to the queen-mother to advocate her cause, and explain the necessity which forced her to the seizure of D'Usson. Villeroi and De Biron, D'Espernon and his vain duchess, erst Countess of Candales —De Quelus and Mademoiselle d'Entragues, a froward sarcastic beauty, with more malice and fewer charms than Candales; De Miron, the royal physician, a pompous functionary; and many others, whom we cannot at this moment recollect, graced or disgraced, as it might happen, the court of Blois.

In addition to these were certain Huguenots, staying at Blois under a safe conduct from his majesty, ostensibly to represent their grievances to the States, but in reality that they might be at hand to negotiate a treaty of alliance with the court. But a treaty of alliance with Catherine was no easy matter to accomplish; her policy, as we have before declared, was to keep both parties balanced against each other, and to incline to neither; she had indeed written privately to Navarre, to request the presence of his agents with power to conclude an alliance with her son, but she had beforehand determined to keep them in play till the last moment—and if that monster Guise and his faction could be quieted without their aid—to send them home as wise as they had arrived.

Nor were they long in discovering her intention, though they had no power to influence her will. The Count de Grammont, unlike our courtly gossiper and tell-tale gallant of a later period, was a rough martial noble, who had spent his whole life in fighting for his faith; he was destitute of all diplomatic capability, save an obstinate will and determined courage, which indeed are often of great service in withstanding the covert finesse of subtler minds, which have power to turn every one to their purpose who does not turn a deaf ear to argument of every description, simple or insinuating. He had been at Blois upwards of a month, having arrived there with his friend in obedience to the specious wish of Catherine, before the assembling of the deputies, that they might have leisure to discuss the articles of the treaty; and he would have left the city, full of anger and impatience at her duplicity, had not the Baron de Rosny, afterward Duke of Sully, his co-agent in the private embassy, withheld him from this open manifestation of spleen.

With the exception, perhaps, of De Nevailles, the Baron de Rosny had acquired the greatest influence over the mind of the brilliant, and it must be confessed, somewhat wayward King of Navarre; and no man better deserved his power, or served his master with more fidelity. To the favourite of Catherine is due the rare merit and the honour of awakening the captive monarch from his luxurious dream of sloth; but to De Rosny, into whose care he fell when De Nevailles quitted his royal friend after their escape from Fontainebleau, must be attributed, in a great degree, the procuration of the finances necessary for keeping together the army which won a name and a halo of glory for the Bourbon at Coutras. But this was not his whole merit.

At the birth of Navarre, nine lives stood between this prince and the crown of France; but the greater proportion of these having fallen into the sleep of dusky death, De Rosny was struck with the idea that the jesting prophecy which he had foretold of his majesty when he first saw the prince, a gallant youth of fifteen, riding by the side of the Admiral Coligni, might prove in due time a sober truth.

That the prophecy had been uttered in a jesting mood there can be but little doubt; though, on the death of the Duke d'Alençon, the baron thought proper to declare that the prediction which he had uttered many years previous, that the Prince of Bearn would be, at a future period, king of France, he had received from an astrologer and mathematician. But even antecedent to the decease of the illustrious tennis-player, De Rosny had pointed out to Navarre that there existed but two out of the many lives which barred his possession of the French crown; that he was a child of destiny; that at his instigation his nativity had been cast, and that he would be the first prince in Europe.

De Rosny was but too well aware of the sluggish nature of the Bourbon, and saw the necessity of urging him onward. He had been the principal adviser in the secret mission of De Nevailles, whose face was unknown in Paris to the imprisoned monarch at the Louvre; and when the captive escaped from his silken chains and flew to Rochelle, De Rosny wrought upon the temper of the prince till he produced the hero of Coutras out of the voluptuary of the Parisian saloons.

The death of D'Alençon increased the value of the baron's prediction, and kept up the excitement of the monarch throughout the winter; he was scarcely ever seen otherwise accoutred

than in his military harness and at the head of his mounted arquebusiers. But though the early spring saw the prince push forward his forces into the heart of the kingdom, even to the central province of Auvergne, he forced no strong position —fought no battles—but loitered about the province like one bewitched. His predicting counsellor, though a brave man, occupied but a subordinate post in the armies of the Huguenots, and employed himself chiefly in the financial department—drawing supplies from all the reformed cities and provinces, and preparing a train of artillery, as Navarre was almost destitute of ordnance.

But when the month of May showed Valois a fugitive from his capital, and De Rosny saw that that event made no impression on the monarch encamped amid the mountains of Auvergne, he felt convinced that Navarre had fallen into a state of lethargy, or was occupied in some trifling amour.

In consequence of this impression, he hastened to the Navarrese camp, and arrived there about the same time that Margaret had taken possession of D'Usson. The Bourbon made excuses to his counsellor for his dilatoriness, saying that he had been long waiting for an opportunity to surprise the fortress. De Rosny, as well as the other Huguenot chiefs, was anxious to know how their leader would act with respect to his neighbour and consort; they were all bitter enemies to Margaret and her mother, and were consequently overjoyed to hear that he did not intend taking advantage of his relation with the present chatelaine of D'Usson to renew their ill-matched and fruitless union. But as there was every prospect of Valois dying without issue, even if he were not cut off speedily by violence, the friends of Navarre were anxious that their chief should not die childless, as was to be apprehended from his present separation from his consort, and they recommended that he should propose a divorce to Margaret, who would consent to it more readily while only Queen of Navarre, than she would if her brother's decease placed her husband on the throne of France.

After several weeks' delay, Navarre, acting on the suggestions of his friends, proposed a conference with his queen, which was acceded to, and at which she gladly assented to a divorce from a marriage which had been forced on her at a time when her heart was lacerated with grief. De Nevailles had already left D'Usson, but Roquelaure drew up the conditions, on the fulfilment of which her majesty promised to

consent to the divorce, and which had relation to dowries, allotments of lands, and other provisions, their extent contingent on the succession of Henry to the throne of Valois.

As Margaret was a favourite with the priesthood, having founded several religious houses on certain lands bequeathed her by her royal father, she ventured to despatch an emissary to Rome to propitiate his holiness to grant a divorce: she sent other messengers to her clerical friends to second her appeal at the Holy See.

Thus did all three parties, the Huguenots, the king, and the Queen of Navarre, heartily agree to the divorce; but each had private and potential reasons, unknown, or at least undeclared, to the others.

While the negotiation with Margaret was pending, the proclamation of Valois arrived for the assembly of the States at Blois, in the September ensuing. Visions of peace now floated before the imaginations of the Huguenots; and as the three parties which divided the kingdom were supposed to be about equal in strength, it was believed that an end would be put to their mutual differences, and articles of concord agreed to.

Ere the time arrived for the assembling of the deputies, a letter was brought to Navarre by a confidential agent of Catherine, requesting him, as we have before related, to urge the Huguenot noblesse to send representatives to the States; and that the deputies chosen should be secretly intrusted by his majesty with credentials to conclude a treaty of alliance with the French court, as a mutual protection against the treacherous designs of the Protector of the League.

It was this request which had brought De Rosny and De Grammont to the court at Blois, where they arrived privately a month previous to the meeting of the *Tiers-Etat*. Catherine, who was determined to be prepared for the most disastrous result, persuaded them to write to Navarre to concentrate his forces as near as possible to Blois, without inducing a necessity on her part of ordering her marshals to proceed against them. This measure was acceded to, and De Rosny pressed her majesty to sign the treaty; but she contrived to put aside his demands without committing herself to a decided refusal to complete the alliance.

It was this double dealing which had so exasperated the rough De Grammont, and determined him to quit the city, from which resolve, as we have before intimated, he only relented at the pressing instance of De Rosny. But the baron, calmer,

subtler, and a superior diplomatist, though exceedingly annoyed at the duplicity of Catherine, fretted his imagination to invent a scheme of policy which would prevent the Huguenots being cajoled by our Lady of the Louvre.

In this dilemma he wrote to De Nevailles to hasten to Blois, convinced that he was the only man who could influence her majesty, and promising that a safe conduct should meet him on the journey—and that in the event of Catherine giving way to her rage when she discovered his identity with the lost Villa Franca, he would offer up his own life in expiation of her revenge.

The letter reached the diplomatist at his château, but he shook his head at the contents, and declined the office. He saw only a prospect of fresh dangers, and the recurrence of a course of action for which he would be afterward blamed by the ungrateful friends who had solicited his services.

De Rosny was in despair when he received the reply, but determined to put up with no refusal in a matter which concerned so closely the fortunes of the Huguenots—for he foresaw that a union between the French court and Navarre would be the only means of vanquishing the Protector of the League and bringing about peace—he wrote to his majesty concerning the refusal of the baron.

But in the meanwhile Margaret, who had been surprised at the hasty departure of De Nevailles from D'Usson, and no less at the grief which Emilie could not longer conceal, questioned her on the cause, and having brought her *protégée* to a confession, assured her that the heart of the baron had never been estranged from her; and that he would, after a while, return a penitent knight to solicit pardon for his absence, and a remission of the continuance of his punishment.

But finding that the dismissed lover did not return to the feet of his mistress, and having herself need of his services, for his holiness required that the queen-mother should be consulted on the matter of the divorce, she wrote to the baron, requesting him to proceed to Blois, and endeavour to induce Catherine to consent to her final separation from Navarre,—adding cunningly, that Emilie joined with her in this request; and that as he had kept faithfully the secrets of the queen-mother, he had naught to apprehend from her anger.

"I differ with you entirely, madame," exclaimed De Nevailles, when he had finished the perusal of the letter;—"her majesty will be shocked to discover that her riches were in the

keeping of an enemy—she will gloat over their recovery—and lock up the casket safely in her own archives! But nevertheless I must go! Chance has ever befriended me, and may be my guardian-deity once more."

He had scarcely made this resolve when a long and urgent epistle, or command, arrived from his liege, conjuring him to aid De Rosny in carrying into execution the meditated alliance. The baron wrote a consenting reply, and after several days' preparation started for Blois.

Two days previous to the opening of the States, our pair of Huguenots were seen issuing from the cabinet of the queen-mother, after an interview which had ended, like every other attempt, unsatisfactorily. De Grammont, the taller of the two, had long past the meridian of life, yet retained the strength and carriage of a warrior;—his features were harsh and inflexible, and his dress carelessly arranged and void of decoration. De Rosny displayed as little taste as his friend in his habiliments, which were, however, adorned with jewels of considerable value;—for the politic wisdom of the baron had taught him the advantages resulting from a regard to personal economy. When he removed the jewelled cap from his brow, he displayed features characteristic of intelligence rather than enthusiasm, only indicated by the brightness of his eyes when excited in the ardour of discourse. His deportment was naturally dignified, but betrayed to close observers a gratuitous affectation of lordly bearing, for which there was not the least occasion, as he had neither lowness of birth to conceal or ignorance to hide.

"Shall we not seek Father Anselm?" cried De Grammont, observing that his companion was taking a contrary direction.

"Ay! to disclose him to the light of day, when he should remain in darkness!" replied De Rosny, in a low voice and reproving tone;—"but never mind what the old tigress and her cub have said; they must fall into our arms at last, or *Notre Dame de Louvre*, as she is profanely called, will sadly overreach herself;—let us walk in the gardens which will one day belong to our master."

With this request the other complied; and as they had been admitted to the palace often enough to be acquainted with its interior, they found their way without assistance through several suites of rooms, and crossing a corridor, emerged on a balcony suspended along the exterior of that side of the palace which overlooked the gardens, and which was placed at a

right angle with the course of the Loire, over whose western track, in its journey to the ocean, the eye of the spectator wandered.

De Rosny and his friend stopped to gaze on the magnificent scene spread out beneath them. The forest of Blois, the winding river, and the forest of Chambord on the opposite bank, with part of its superb palace, built by Francis the First, formed the grander elements of the prospect, which was dotted throughout with innumerable châteaux and convents of the various religious orders which in this, as in every other district of France, save within the quarters of the Huguenots, who had dismantled all within their reach, were very numerous.

"Those cowled thieves swarm here as thickly as the bees in the gardens of Pau," cried De Grammont; "yet why should the reformation be confined to a few provinces? With God's help, matins and vespers, the host and its idolatries, shall in a future age be forgotten words, from the Pyrenees to the Rhine."

"I say amen! to such a hope," replied De Rosny; "but let us recollect we are now labouring to that end, and must fix our eyes steadily on each day's purpose, and forget the glorious accomplishment in the means. We are humble instruments of a Divine will, and our looks must be humble.—Blood will be spilt soon."

"Mine has been spilt for many a year," rejoined the count.

"Ay, but I mean signally! not in the tented field, but in the crowded hall, or the dainty banquet-room, or mayhap," continued De Rosny, "in the assembly of the States itself."

"And whose blood?" murmured De Grammont, with somewhat of an incredulous smile.

"Whose!" exclaimed the baron, "is it not palpable?—Walk hither, lest some one be within hearing. I tell thee what, cousin and fellow-labourer, and mark my words!—either Guise will kill the king, or the king will kill the duke."

"Ah! your sharp eyes have shadowed out a plot then!" whispered the count, grasping the arm of his friend;—"but it matters not to me which falls, for both must go to make room for our liege."

"Bravely spoken, cousin," whispered the other, "you grow more discerning. *It does not matter which*, you say. Bravo, well spoken:—but it does matter which!—yet let us not whisper so close to stone-walls, but retire to the trees, or I might say statues and *termini*, for stone is more plentiful than

wood in the gardens of *Notre Dame de Louvre.* I like to repeat that profanity."

At the farther end of the balcony was a flight of steps, which conducted the visiter into the gardens without the necessity of his re-entering the palace—a noble contrivance, as it afforded the inmates, in their progress to the sylvan beauties of the *Château de Blois*, a grander view of the wide spread scene than they would have gained by issuing from the palace from the *rez-de-chaussée* beneath.

By these stairs the two friends descended into the upper gardens, from which a gallery and staircase led into the lower, which were distinct from the former, by reason of the abrupt descent of the ground as it approached the banks of the river. From a paved circular space ornamented with statuary, several noble avenues branched out, each terminated by some object of the architect or sculptor's skill.

"Let us attempt to carry that classic temple," said De Rosny, entering the most retired avenue;—"it cannot make a very stout resistance, and we shall there be free from eavesdroppers."

"It matters materially, count," continued his friend as they walked up the broad avenue, "whether the king kill Guise or Guise kill his Majesty of France—and for this reason. If Guise kill the king, no one will be found to revenge his death; and the arch-traitor will live to occupy the throne of right belonging to our own liege lord—but if Valois kill the duke, the priests will kill his majesty, and so revenge the slaughter of their chief. Thus the road will open to the King of Navarre, who will carry the sceptre *jure divino.* It is scarcely accounted a secret that the monks have already made an attempt on the life of Valois—perhaps more than one—and his majesty holds himself very privately, out of the reach of strangers, in consequence. Ah! no! they would not let him escape if his fingers were concerned in the death of the Protector of the League. They may even achieve their purpose without such excitement—but I hope not—for we should then stand in the same predicament as if Guise had done the act."

"But you have not yet told me, baron," observed De Grammont, "what are the signs by which you dare predicate such an outburst of man's will. I can neither dream nor prophesy, and am perhaps dull-eyed, even to those things which lie about me. You hear a sigh or a moan, or perceive a shudder, per-

haps,—and up starts a picture of destruction to distract your vision!"

"Outbursts of man's will,—as you designate them," replied De Rosny, calmly, "never distract my vision. Nothing moves me but the wretched state of Navarre's finances—money is the spring and war-horse of chivalry. I have sold the growth of all my thick well-stocked plantations to place our army on a respectable footing—and I'll make the Catholics repay me."

"When Navarre sits enthroned in the Louvre he will not forget us," said Grammont; "but you have forgotten the signs!—are they such as a plain soldier like myself can fashion into a forthcoming truth?"

"Since I have been in this most idolatrous city," replied the baron, "where even the mass-ridden artisan pretends that he speaks a purer dialect than we of the purest blood of France, I have seen Valois every day. I have noted those shrugs and starts, and compressions of the eyebrows—they used to be arched and expansive—and I glean from these signs that his mind is in labour, and will bring forth a sharp-toothed dragon, which will dart its sting unawares into its parent's foe—and then sink cowardly into the earth! Valois is mad—mad with an imprisoned will!"

"I can discern a glimpse of meaning," exclaimed Grammont, smiling, "but I cannot see through your image clearer than did our gracious liege when you placed before him a scheme for the consolidation of the Navarrese revenues!"

"Come! come! cousin De Grammont," cried the baron, good-humouredly, "wit ought not to originate in ignorance and defective perception. We have both need of it against that bantering Duchess d'Usez and her friends—and we have need of all our faculties at this season—the crisis of the Huguenot faith. If Guise only use his power with ordinary skill, he must force our Lady of the Louvre into our arms—and thank Heaven! we stand prepared to seize the favourable moment. Our good friend, the gay insinuating Queen of Navarre, is in our interest. Even you, De Grammont, with all your just hatred of the abominations of Rome, would be loath to speak ill of her—and also of Father Roquelaure, her agent, and the aid-de-camp of our leader, Father Anselm! We are as gallant a band as ever had footing in an enemy's territory."

"Ah! it may be agreeable to our venturous leader to en-

sconce himself beneath the roof of his enemy," replied the count; "but if my opinion had had sway, Father Anselm should never have come to Blois till her majesty desired his presence;—it was a step beyond the usual prudent caution of the Baron de Rosny's counsel."

"Defer your judgment till De Nevailles arrives," said the baron, quickly; "his maxim is, to shake hands with danger, as boys grasp nettles. Let us hear his opinion."

"I would give all the armour in my hall—ay—even Count Robert's suit, rather than be absent from Blois when the baron meets his old mistress," said De Grammont.

They were now close to the Grecian temple, and apparently at the termination of the gardens; but on ascending the steps into the interior, were surprised on beholding another avenue to the right. It was shadowed by a grove of lofty trees overarching at their tops, and almost depriving of the sun's rays a canal equal in length to the avenue. The water, though still and without current or spring, nearly overflowed its banks, causing the herbage which grew on the margin to exhibit a deeper green and more luxuriant growth than the sward which covered the scarcely-trodden foot-path of the grove. At the termination of the vista the light shone on the water, which widened into a basin; in front, in a direct line with the temple, were a handrail and several wooden steps descending into the canal for the accommodation of a holy brotherhood, the gothic doorway of whose edifice shut in the distant scene.

A gleam of contempt stole over the features of the stern old Huguenot soldier and noble, as his eye rested on the abode of the monks.

"Palace and convent! convent and palace!" exclaimed he, turning to his smoother friend, "sceptre and cowl! helmet and tonsure! pike and crosier! Thus is the throne of Charlemagne bound to the rotten sanctuaries of bigotry and cruelty."

"Even so," replied De Rosny; "but Valois is himself ashamed of yonder work. Catherine, with an affectation of making me her confidant in a little disclosure, said that his majesty had made a grant to the Capuchins of the land, and they evinced their gratitude by sending half their brethren to join the army of monks at the affair of the barricades."

"True! they wanted the château itself," said the count; "but look, the balcony of the castle is crowded with dames and gallants—we need not enter the palace amid a shower of jibes and

smiles, as harmless as snow, but quite as annoying. Let us walk by this stagnant puddle—an emblem of yon spider's-nest. Father Anselm may have received advice of the arrival of De Nevailles."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Est-ce Narcisse qui aima
L'eau qui sa face consomma,
Amoureux de sa beauté vaine?
EPITAPH ON THE COUNT DE QUELUS.

AMID the death-struggling of dynasties, and the fierce contentions for supremacy, when thrones which have grown ancient in the eye of the world are tottering beneath the blows of new powers and authorities, the voice of mirth and gayety is still heard in the pauses of the storm. Slaughter succeeds festival, and festival succeeds slaughter—ere the dying hero or partisan draws his last breath, the war-note which proclaimed his doom is hushed by the tinkling cymbal of Terpsichore; the shifting panorama of life changes from the battle-field to the illuminated saloon; the orchestra strikes up a fresh tune; and human figures flit round in a mazy ring.

Coutras! De Joyeuse! these are but names floating in memory! yet they may again become realities! But in the interval, Catherine de Medicis holds her court in the kingly city—in its proud palace! The grand hall is more lustrous than day! It breathes an atmosphere of light! Music is borne floating from distant saloons to the guests of royalty.

All the chivalry and beauty of France which had continued faithful to the house of Valois, were congregated in the superb hall of the palace. Guise and his adherents were left to brood over their schemes and thicken their treason, forgotten for one night by the gay revellers.

Amid the gallants who graced the fête of the queen-mother none were more conspicuous than the Count de Quelus, the knight of the green cuirass. In the tented field he was but a star of secondary importance; his stature was overreached—his bravery equalled—his skill surpassed; but in the saloon he was unrivalled. The count was rather below than above the

ordinary height; slenderly proportioned—too much so for the taste of the age—had not his limbs been moulded so harmoniously in youthful symmetry that criticism was silenced even in the mouth of the hardy warrior, or the fair dame, taught to regard a giant stature as the beau-ideal of manhood. His features, regular in contour and aristocratic in expression, were pale—destitute both of the rustic glow of health and the habitual flush of the soldier—a fault inexcusable in the eyes of D'Usez and the ladies of the court.

The count was apparelled in a doublet and nether dress which displayed his figure to the best advantage; he was decorated with the three orders of the king;—the *toison d'or*, or golden fleece, which accrued to the house of Valois by the acquisition of Burgundy—the order of St. Michael; and lastly, the badge of the Holy Ghost, a dove in the centre of golden radii.

Yet notwithstanding his elegant shape, decorative jewels, and graceful movements, De Quelus was not a favourite with the ladies of Catherine's court. Whether it was their fault,—a resentment evinced towards one who had invaded their province by a more than ordinary attention to personal *economia*,—or whether an exquisite is too much in love with himself to pay those devoirs to the sex which they hold as lawful prerogative,—we cannot say; but can only regret that many a gallant less deserving of ladies' regards was more favoured than the count.

We are not certain, however, but that his ill-success partly arose from a secret contempt, felt rather than seen, which he entertained against his friends of both sexes. He had spent much time in the gayest Italian cities, and had contracted a partiality for their fashions and more refined tone of intercourse. With the ladies of Italy he had been avowedly a favourite; and their style of beauty and conversation prepared him for the distaste which he felt for his countrywomen.

The graces of civilization had not, as yet, rendered the Louvre equal to the Italian courts in politeness; and De Quelus, upon his return, being gifted in a superior degree with the accomplishments of the land of his sojourn, became a reformer, and gained obloquy thereby rather than admiration.

The festival was, indeed, the occasion of his first appearance among the gay creatures of the court, since the fatal *journée de Coutras*. The wounds received in attempting to

rescue De Joyeuse had forced the count to remain many months in retirement at his estates; and these he had only quitted to attend the assembly of the States, having been elected a deputy by the noblesse of Languedoc, who were, like himself, favourable to the reigning dynasty.

The chief idea or image present to the mind of De Quelus was his own trim person, in the adorning and taking care of which consisted his principal study. Not that the outward frame of flesh and blood, which glittered in hall and bower to the admiration of beholders, was cherished by its owner to the entire forgetfulness of the spiritual portion of his nature; but mental accomplishments were cultivated not for the sake of displaying an elegant mind, but on account of the bodily grace which accompanied their outward volitions. The body in fact was not complete without a mind which could direct it harmoniously.

Even military renown was of inferior importance to the ambition of a graceful carriage, and a person *comme il faut*. The count had been laughed at by D'Usez and her train for his pale complexion; but though he secretly despised the duchess, yet vanity, like ambition and other feelings of the same generic character, is forced to seek its food in the smiles of contemned inferiors; so our knight of the fanciful cuirass resolved to remedy the imputed fault. Hardy exercise imparts a healthy glow to the complexion, said the count:—and he joined the gaudy armament of De Joyeuse. But the stern pikemen of the Huguenot army dispelled the flattering vision of roseate cheeks; De Quelus exiled himself from the Louvre for awhile in despair, and now presented himself at Blois with his usual pale Italian hue.

The air of the lively Coranto had just ceased, and the guests were quitting the arena of the dance, when our knight of three orders found himself entangled in the meshes of D'Usez's wit. Unawares he had dropped into a little circle, consisting of the duchess, the Marshal de Biron, Mademoiselle d'Entragues, D'Espernon and his giddy wife, and Alphonso de Corso, an Italian gentleman, a follower of his countrywoman Catherine.

"Nay, monseigneur! do not run away," cried madame; "we were but just now talking of your absence from our despairing eyes."

"Yes!" added the forward D'Entragues; "and we likened you to a Gueldres-rose."

"What! afraid?" exclaimed Alphonso, staying the departing count.

"I am not afraid, as you so facetiously express yourself in the brevity of your country's wit," replied De Quelus; "but madame collects her power as boys do snow—so let it content her—the ball will be increased during my absence—I will bear the shower manfully when next we meet."

De Corso was about to reply, when a slight buzz of voices was heard near the hall-door; and upon the friends of D'Usez looking in that direction, they beheld a lady entering the hall who immediately attracted all eyes to herself. Such an enshrinement of simplicity in a form so sweetly voluptuous they had never seen before. The fair unknown's dress was much simpler than the rich display of her compeers; her care seemed to have been directed to her hair only, which was intermixed with gems glittering in their shady element; she was in company with another of long standing at the court, whose polished air contrasted strongly with the perceptible provincial bearing of her companion.

A smile of triumph sat on the lips of De Quelus, which D'Usez perceived as she turned to her own circle, after watching the course of the fair comet. There was some asperity in the tone with which she addressed the fastidious noble.

"Well, monseigneur, you seem to have recovered your self-possession: may we know the method of your cure?"

"As simple as myself, madame," replied the count; "I was indulging in a mere suggestion, whether the crescent-moon be not jealous of the evening-star."

"The crescent-moon, count," retorted the duchess, "fears no stars, and is obnoxious only to the gloomy clouds which lurk about her sky, threatening moon, stars, and every thing else that is bright."

"And yet one cannot call monseigneur gloomy," observed D'Entragues, in her pert malicious style, breaking the veil of D'Usez's metaphor, "with those diamonds on his breast. If he be indeed a cloud, he is one turned inside out."

This abrupt remark of the provincial dame produced a general laugh in the circle, which made De Quelus very angry; he smiled as openly as the close contact of his double row of teeth would allow him.

De Biron, who had been watching the stranger lady during this contention, and who was now approaching near their group, said—

"I must speak to the fair Arcadian, and inquire what news from Arcadia or the vale of Tempe. She wants but a spear to be a Thessalian huntress, or Dian herself."

"I wish she had one," exclaimed D'Entragues; "you, marshal, should set the fair huntress the task of encountering that savage lion" (the malicious speaker looking, while speaking, at De Quelus) "now showing his teeth."

De Biron was disappointed, however, for the Cardinal du Perron and a Polish nobleman in a dress trimmed with rich fur, engaged the lady in conversation. The count meanwhile retreated from the presence of his friends that he might gaze in silence on the rustic beauty; he would gladly have learned her name, but asking such a question of any one was to the fastidious noble a procedure too vulgar for his refined taste; he felt that he could look upon her till he had read her title, fortune, and feelings, in her face. Yet was she a simple maiden, deficient in the courtly ease which the count so highly prized.

"Ah! De Quelus has left us," exclaimed the duchess; "he is as morose as De Bouillon in his penitential robe, and deprived of a dinner."

"Poor De Bouillon has just died at Geneva, among the heretics," said D'Espernon, "and left his sister heiress of the sovereign dukedom; a rare prize for some one of our friends! the bad Calvinistic fare must have killed him."

"He was as effeminate in his eating as De Quelus in dress," observed the marshal. "Our brave count, as I am told by a gentleman from Languedoc, since the recovery of his wounds, frightened the peasantry by riding about in the hooded penitential sack, to preserve his complexion from the tanning power of his country's sun. My friend once met him thus apparelled, riding at full speed, followed by his dogs; and a first impression of the strange vision was derogatory to the priesthood. He fancied the rider a poor monk, who had taken a gentleman unawares, having seized his jewelled cap, and placed it over his own cowl; and that upon running away also with his horse, he was pursued by its master's hounds."

"And how did he recognise the count?" said Alphonso.

"By the fanciful shape of his boot," replied De Biron, amid a roar of laughter.

The conversation was at this moment interrupted by a flourish of trumpets, which announced the entry of their majes-

ties; Valois, escorting his royal parent, attended by a train of ladies and courtiers. The queen had thrown aside her plain sable dress, and was arrayed in a vestment of cloth of gold, a present from the Grand Seignior to the French ambassador at Constantinople, and by the latter presented to his royal mistress. It was overlaid by an arabesque pattern, formed entirely of precious stones, which catching the reflection of the many candelabras and ornamented lamps, made her almost too dazzling for eyes to look on; her hair was ornamented in the fashion of the age with brilliant gems—and in front, above the forehead—by a star of large diamonds.

Instantly conversation was suspended—all the guests bowed to their majesties, who advanced to the middle of the saloon. As the company stood, awaiting the royal movements, one of the pages in the rear was nearly upset by Chicot, who came bouncing into the hall; and after surveying, with looks of astonishment, the position of the guests—for the entry of the royal party had fixed them like so many statues after the first salutation—he began a slow fantastic dance, kissing his hand to every lady as he passed by, till accidentally perceiving De Quelus, he paused with a look of admiration at the elegant figure of the noble, and after bowing profoundly, surveyed his own habiliments and rather awkward person with a despairing shake of the head.

But presently he seemed to gather courage, and commenced adjusting himself *à la Quelus*, by throwing aside his thick hair—drawing tighter round his throat the collar of a pink doublet—undoing his sash, and tying it afresh, to the infinite mirth of the guests, after the manner of the count, whose person he looked at as if it were a mirror. But when his eye caught the jewelled dove glittering on the breast of the noble, he clapped his hand to his own bare doublet, and turning round, cast a piteous look toward Valois. He again surveyed the count, and after another melancholy shake of the head retreated backward, incessantly bowing to his model—who took the whim in excellent humour and without flinching, which quite disarmed the ridicule—till he was close to her majesty, whom he would certainly have borne down with all her splendour, had not the little frolicsome page whom he had previously run against, placed himself on his hands and knees behind the jester. The fool was tumbled over, and lay on his back, sprawling at the queen's feet.

Roars of laughter, in which royalty joined, followed the discomfiture of Chicot, who arose in a bad humour, and slunk aside; but the little page ran after him; and pointed first at the disordered rosette on the jester's shoe, and then at the trim feet of the count. Chicot turned angrily upon his tormentor; but the malicious boy lifted up both hands to his curly head, and taking a flaxen lock in each, drew them out so as to represent the symbolic ears of a fool's crest; and after jerking his head from side to side in derision, he put one foot on the other, and executing a neat twirl, ran away from the ire of Chicot, and screened himself in the ample folds of her majesty's train.

This attack, after his own fashion, was too much for the stomach of the jester, and he retired silently to regain his courage and mirth.

As had been remarked by De Rosny, there was a change in the appearance of Valois; a mysterious deportment, seemingly the result of a feeling which allowed its possessor no repose; it evinced its activity by frequent and abrupt glances; these were succeeded by fits of absence, in which he disregarded the attentions of the courtiers. The splendour by which he was environed seemed irksome to him, though at intervals he laughed immoderately, and at the most trifling objects. By the court these symptoms were traced in part to their right source; they were regarded as demonstrations of humiliated pride in having been driven from his capital, mingled with reflections on apparent evil yet to come.

But his friends did not search deep enough; they had not the penetration of the Huguenot envoy, and imagined only the disorder of the passion, pride, when indeed a chorus of demons were plotting within his soul. Even Catherine was deceived; she could not attribute any daring scheme to the mild superstitious Henry, now that he sat again under the shelter and influence of her active will. But whatever might be working within his mind, he did not make the queen-mother a confidant; from which omission we may presume, he thought she would have thwarted his policy.

The guests after awhile resumed dancing; in the midst of which entered the Baron de Rosny and his friend De Grammont, both seemingly much pleased with some secret source of delight. Heedless of the attention which they attracted to themselves by their marked difference of apparel and carriage to the courtlier guests, the subtle baron crossed the hall talking

rapidly to the count, as though they were in the council-chamber; while De Grammont, who was much taller, bent down in the attitude of listening, his rough military aspect and determined expression bringing to the memory of the male portion of the company the stern encounter at Coutras. Their position at Blois as agents of Navarre, could not be concealed; for although chosen deputies to the States, yet the rumour of certain conferences soon got wind, and farther concealment was useless. To the surprise of the company, and the laughter of D'Usez, who said they must be suffering under the delusion of believing the hall to be her majesty's cabinet, they walked straight to the queen, with whom they were immediately engaged in earnest conversation.

During the colloquy, Father Roquelaure, presuming upon his laical character of envoy from the Queen of Navarre, ventured to insinuate his giant-height into the hall of gayety. As soon as he was espied there ensued almost a round of applause—certainly a noise of greeting, of which he could not but be sensible—but nowise daunted, the Cordelier strode over the space which had but now echoed the steps of the light bounding feet of beauty, and joined D'Espernon and the marshal.

But he was soon surrounded by the ladies, who eagerly demanded the latest news from D'Usson, and every particular connected with the Queen of Hearts; whose dominion over the fashions of the era was now assumed by her friend D'Usez.

Roquelaure was at first extremely circumspect in his replies, and spoke very guardedly of the conduct of the Queen of Navarre; but one question stimulated another—one reply necessitated a second, and he was gradually drawn into a history which he would fain have omitted. But the well-timed flattery of the fair creatures around him—the ready laugh and accordant smile which echoed his replies, threw him off his guard; and, forgetful that the old governor of D'Usson was at Blois, seeking redress for the forcible acquisition of the fortress, he proceeded to depict the misfortunes of the marquis in so ludicrous a light, that all were convulsed with laughter. To such a degree was he urged on by the subtle courtiers and their fair coadjutors, that he forgot the due distinction between right and wrong, and fairly praised the Baron de Nevailles for his ability.

"Yes!" exclaimed he, in reply to a remark of D'Entragues, "he is the cleverest man in France!"

"He is a foul cheat and a heretic! and yet not many degrees

worse than yourself!" shouted a voice, which the Cordelier, to his dismay, recognised to be that of the Marquis de Cœuvres.

Consternation was visible in the features of Roquelaure, who was now alarmingly convinced of his imprudence and overheated excitation; but to his malicious auditors, who had gradually wrought him to this state, the *contretemps* was accounted a happy and ludicrous incident.

When a crowd of patient listeners hear the voice of a rival orator, or charlatan, or demagogue, beyond the limits of their close circle, so greatly do they become possessed with the desire of giving every competitor a fair chance, that the section nearest the new aspirant invariably opens, and brings the two rivals into collision. So was it in the present instance,—and Roquelaure found himself face to face with the indignant Marquis de Cœuvres.

"If you wore not a garb of sanctity, Father Hypocrite," cried the marquis, "you should answer your chuckling laughter with a death-rattle in your throat."

"*Monsieur le Marquis!*" cried De Biron, "you forget that you are in the presence of the Queen of France."

"I do! I do! marshal!" said De Cœuvres; "but her majesty would pardon me! I am calm! I will await a juster triumph than threatening this wicked Cordelier."

The marquis, who was the most loyal of subjects, was so moved by the appeal of the marshal that he smothered his anger, and listened with apparent patience to an apology from the monk, who endeavoured, with the aid of a considerable share of rhetoric, to exculpate himself from any co-operation in the assumption of the fortress; but however necessary this harangue might be for his own vindication, it was not listened to with half so much pleasure as his previous narrative.

The Cordelier, who had fared as ill as Chicot, retired equally discomfited from the arena of contention; while the marquis, who was now joined by the fair unknown—no other than his daughter Gabrielle, who had remained secluded in the palace till this evening—became the centre of attraction; which the old noble cruelly took advantage of, to tell many a stale anecdote of the first Francis and his gay court. But men might readily shut their ears while gazing on the graceful rose of Cœuvres.

After awhile the marquis, who had no great tact in political matters, and spoke his mind more readily than would at

all times have become a servant of Catherine, insisted that there had been a civil war in the streets of the city that very day; for which he did not scruple to blame the authorities.

It was in truth at the commencement but a trivial affair, but might have grown, if De Biron had not luckily interposed the Swiss, into a serious encounter. A troop of the king's pages, in their passage through the streets, met with several of the pages of the Protector of the League opposite the palace of Justice! Angry, taunting words ensued, which were soon changed for the play of rapiers; the pages of the duke were reinforced by his partisans, and the fight was becoming general when the marshal arrived and dispersed the combatants. Both Guise and Valois were anxious that the matter should be hushed up, as such a paltry display of strength did not redound to the reputation of either, and especially as but one more day intervened before the meeting of the assembly. De Biron endeavoured to convince the marquis that the contention was beneath notice.

"Ah! *Monsieur le Maréchal!*" exclaimed De Cœuvres, "I heard the tumult, and I was informed that many gentlemen took part in the contest. All your friends now here were no doubt engaged."

"Not I, monsieur, I assure you," said De Quelus, quickly; —"if it had happened two hours earlier I should have been glad of the morning exercise, but I never touch a rapier, if I can help it, after dinner."

"It must have been a troop of market-women singing, which monseigneur heard as he lay in bed," said Mademoiselle d'Entragues.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed De Cœuvres; "market-women would not have sheltered themselves behind a breastwork of cabbages, which I am told the retainers of the Duke of Guise did in the market-place. Perhaps mademoiselle can inform me what women can know about the stratagems of warfare."

"Oh! more than you are aware of, monsieur!" cried De Biron, determined upon silencing the foolish, garrulous old noble; "but there is this difference—men often venture in front of their breastworks, while women always keep close behind them."

This well-timed sally produced the intended effect; the group were agitated with laughter; and the Duchess d'Espernon, who

had quitted the circle that she might gaze more closely at the pair of monsters, as she called them, who had engrossed the ear of majesty, now returned to communicate to her friends that the notorious Baron de Nevailles, *in propriâ personâ*, was at that instant in the palace, having just arrived from the country south of the Loire with instructions from his liege the King of Navarre.

"Thank Heaven!" cried De Cœuvres; "I will now charge the baron to his face!"

"That you may do in a very short time, monsieur," said the consort of D'Espernon; "her majesty, who is extremely anxious to behold one so celebrated by his own party, has intimated a desire for his appearance in the hall, if he be not too much fatigued."

"Is he like Baron de Rosny?" asked D'Entragues, addressing De Cœuvres, who was evidently much excited by the news.

"These heretics are all alike, mademoiselle," replied the marquis; "either smooth-faced rogues or grim-looking troopers. Quite wild beasts—cunning foxes or surly wolves—I assure you! No Christian feeling at all in them—mere robber-chiefs, whom it behooves good Catholics to put down with a strong arm!"

Expectation was at its height when it was known that the queen had invited the heretic envoy to her presence; all were desirous of seeing one who, in addition to his services in the cause of the Huguenots, had won so much upon the friendship of the Queen of Navarre as to be intrusted by her with the most important secrets. Public fame had reported the baron to have passed his life—or at least his youth, for he was not as yet advanced beyond the opening career of manhood—among Genevese doctors, itinerant Huguenot preachers, and the rough unpolished partisans of the heretic house of Bourbon and Navarre. Can such an education have rendered him aught but disagreeable to the voluptuous Margaret? was the question asked of each other by the courtiers of Valois.

The dance was suspended—the music which floated from the adjoining saloon fell idly on the ear unlistened to—the guests disposed in groups over the entire extent of the hall, gradually drew near to majesty, that they might witness the expected exhibition. A spectator entering for the first time would have surmised the existence or approach of some

dreadful calamity; a royal headache or fainting-fit, or, mayhap the busy calm which ensues upon the receipt of unwelcome intelligence;—the loss of a province or a kingdom.

Madame d'Usez took her station by the side of Catherine, who was seated in a chair of state placed for her accommodation close against the tapestry which covered the entire extent of the wall. On her left hand sat Valois, in a less ostentatious chair; near him stood Villeroi, De Biron, and M. de Miron, the royal physician; on the right hand of her majesty, and peeping over the shoulder of D'Usez, were seen the expressive features of the Princess de Condé, who looked upon the scene from her retreat with the eye of an *artiste*.

Curiosity was strung to its utmost pitch, when Davila, with a face more expressive than usual, entered the hall, followed by the Navarrese ambassador and his friends, De Grammont and De Rosny, who had retired from the royal presence to escort him to the foot of the throne. Whatever fatigue the functionary might have undergone in his journey, it had left no traces of its existence on the manly features which met the gaze of all eyes; neither had it been permitted to put in a languid plea for an ill-arranged habit and neglected person. The ambassador had been allowed time to array himself with the utmost care. He was dressed in a suit of black, clasping his handsome figure from throat to heel with the compactness of sartorial skill; nor was the sable colour allowed to deepen into a gloom unbefitting the occasion; the laced frill around the neck—the dark sash of lace spangled with ornaments of jetty lustre—the sword-belt studded with diamonds, and vying in brilliancy with a dagger worn at the side, both hilt and scabbard lustrous with the same rare stones—a kingly present to an ancestor of the ambassador—and the sword itself, with its shining hilt and sheath of velvet—rescued the person of monseigneur from the charge of gloominess.

As he stepped gracefully across the saloon, it seemed as though the breath of all the guests was suspended—a calm, unnatural yet impressive, reigned throughout—and silence was only broken by the echoing tread of the martial De Grammont, who strode after his light-heeled friend, as a jailer in the footsteps of one whose heart is light with newly-granted liberty.

But the wonder of which this silence had been the mute symbol was of a sudden voice-gifted, and there rose a discordant chorus of exclamations of surprise, which almost drowned the noise caused by the violent movement of her majesty, who rushed from her chair of state.

When the momentary wonderment, and as it were confused vision of the spectators had passed away, they beheld the ambassador kneeling before the queen, who seemed scarcely able to contain the violent emotions which agitated her frame, and which caused her to move rapidly to and fro before the envoy. The court, which had equal cause of wonder with its mistress, trembled for the safety of the kneeling suppliant, who was exposed to the threatened fury of a woman whose anger was too great to allow her either to speak or stand still.

The ambassador, without attempting to rise, presented his credentials to her majesty; and De Biron, anxious to perform a service to his former *protégé*, took the letter from his hands, and gave it to the queen. During a glance of anger at the envoy of Navarre, she snatched the paper from the marshal; but had no sooner uttered the words, "Well-beloved baron," than she flung it with scorn to the ground, and turning her back on the still kneeling noble, commenced talking earnestly to her son.

Meanwhile the Marquis de Cœuvres, who, as he imagined, rightly understood the cause of this most bitter insult, approached her majesty with a heart almost overcome with gratitude. He bowed; and she ceased speaking to Valois.

"Your majesty," exclaimed the old governor, in a tone of deep-felt thankfulness, yet ludicrous from its mistaken impulse, "has made me the happiest of mortals. This, indeed, is compensation for my loss! But though his treacherous behaviour at D'Usson merits your anger—yet I pray you, now that my honour is satisfied—that you will not forget his character as representative of the King of Navarre, whom I do not wish slighted for my sake!"

Catherine looked at the marquis for a few moments with surprise—but her features gradually relaxed, and she burst into one of her habitual fits of excessive laughter.

"For your sake! *O mon Dieu!*" cried the queen, when her emotion had in some degree subsided.

Laughter is contagious, though it needed not the aid of sympathy to induce the guests to follow the example of Catherine; it was impossible to think for a moment of the vain error of *Monsieur le Marquis* without mirth; it was equally impossible to behold his mingled astonishment and alarm at her Majesty's reply, without being as much convulsed as royalty.

Valois, who beheld only an enemy of his enemy, in the person of the Baron De Nevailles, took pity on his humiliating posture, and commanded him to rise; and in order to wipe away, as much as possible, the disgrace he had suffered, entered into conversation with the Baron.

"Behold our trusty councillor," exclaimed Catherine, sarcastically.—"Our good friends must excuse our emotion on meeting with a long-lost friend!"

And with these words her Majesty, after saluting De Nevailles haughtily, left the hall with her ladies.

Notwithstanding the angry display of the Queen, it was her pride which had been chiefly wounded, and which had caused the violent outburst of rage. It was not her interest to quarrel with Navarre or his friends at the present moment,—and the Baron knew this as well as herself, —indeed, her critical position with the Leaguers caused her to be delighted with the idea of holding the Huguenots more closely in her grasp by the presence of the anticipated envoy—and had he gone through the ceremony of a private audience, it is possible his reception would have been very different.

But to meet in the face of the whole court the heretic Baron De Nevailles—and to discover at one glance that she had been duped and deceived—that her pretended adviser and councillor, the adroit Villa Franca, so pure in his religious faith, so bound up in the interests of his royal mistress, and so deeply in her confidence—was the same individual with the noted enemy of the Catholics, the daring abettor in the escape of Navarre, and one of the heroes of Coutras—was wormwood. Either herself or the Baron must be humiliated—and to permit him to come insolently to Blois, and outbrave her anger in her own palace, was not to be endured—the lightning of her rage vindicated her dignity, and though flashing indignantly, and as it were, beyond her control,—yet we should do injustice to the temper of our lady of the Louvre, were we to affirm that to have silenced it, was beyond her power.

Quick as the passage of light, the thoughts which we have slowly elaborated and detailed, passed through her mind, when her eyes first encountered the figure of Villa Franca.

She retired to her cabinet to ponder on the extraordinary occurrence which had befallen her, with its remote and immediate consequences, while De Nevailles was forced to undergo a tedious ordeal at the hands of his former friends, both fair and masculine, to whom, in the presence of the amused Valois, he was obliged for peace sake to narrate at length sundry portions of his adventures subsequent to his flight from the Louvre, in addition to the motives which induced him to flee. As he sought his chamber, he was met by the well-known face of the usher, and conducted to the cabinet of her Majesty, where in the presence of De Biron, who was summoned for that purpose, he made a full confession of his exploits, and received a free pardon for his deceptive delinquencies in consideration of the fidelity with which he had preserved the secrets of the house of Valois—not the least of which was the double employment of our old friend Nicholas Poulain.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Fasse le ciel que tout ce beau trafic
Que remuez pour le repos public,
Comme mon feu ne se tourne en fumee!
Je vous dirai que jugement je fais
De nos Etats—c'est une masquerade,
Ou les plus grands s'entredonnent cassade,
Feignans vouloir du bien public la paix.
* * * * * *
Bref, dans Blois vous y voyez merveille,
Mais quant a moi je n'y voy qu'un chaos.

PASQUIER.

HOWEVER great the shock of surprise which Catherine experienced in beholding once more the insinuating Villa Franca; yet she was not yet fully aware of the extent to which the Huguenots, whom her Majesty was retaining by fair speeches and promises, never intended to be ful-

filled unless necessity forced their accomplishment, were practising their hidden policy beneath her roof. Could she have penetrated the intimacy which subsisted between De Rosny and Roquelaure, she would have been convinced of the truth, that those who deceive most, are often themselves deceived when they least expect it; and in quarters where they imagine they are exercising the influence of a subtle mind over ignorance or honourable independence. Or, could she have recognised in the humble companion of Roquelaure, the chief of the Huguenots; could she have known that Father Anselm, ostensibly one of the brotherhood to whom the agent of the Queen of Navarre belonged, and who had been, as Roquelaure affirmed, drawn from his convent to act as secretary to our giant friend, was the hero of Coutras himself, we fear that a close confinement would have again been the lot of his Majesty; and that neither generosity nor policy would have intervened in his favour.

When Catherine requested of the Baron De Rosny that the forces of the Huguenots should be held in readiness to march to the aid of Valois, if an emergency should arise, which the violence of the Leaguers assembled at Blois rendered very probable, Navarre told his friends, that he would himself repair thither, that he might be at hand to assist the court, and assert his own rights with respect to the succession.

It was the reverse of prudent, to attempt to carry into execution such a freak, but he was so bent on the adventure, that De Rosny was forced to submit. And there was a show of reason in his argument, that affairs might take such a turn, that his own appearance at the assembly of the States, as Duke De Vendôme, might be essential to the establishment of his claim to the throne of France on the demise of Valois.

But the arguments made use of by the Bourbon to justify his romantic journey to Blois, were specious and deceptive, and intended only to conceal his real motives, which it is necessary for the consistency of his conduct that we should reveal.

It had been his fortune, or misfortune, to meet with Gabrielle, on her return to D'Usson from a visit at Issoire; and some trifling service which he rendered at the ford of the Allier established their intimacy. The monarch, attended only by several of his train, was unknown to the

fair D'Estrées, but the passion which he conceived for her, induced him to declare his rank, accompanied with protestations of affection, which shocked the lady, unable to resolve the inconsistency of a prince professing attachment at a first interview; nor how one so famed for his chivalry and honour, could insult her with the offer of what he had it not in his power to bestow.

But Navarre, whose warmth of temperament was such that a short hour sufficed to render him a despairing lover, was not to be baffled by an obstacle which he had previously determined to remove. He explained to the lady that Margaret was indifferent to the union which had been forced upon her—that his own councillors desired the divorce of a marriage which would blight the prospects of the kingdom of Navarre; and that as rumour had already reported his consort to have quitted the court of her mother, she would gladly acquiesce in the proposal of a divorce: a measure, he added, she had long earnestly desired during their sojourn at the Louvre.

To these representations Gabrielle would have given but little heed, had she not been prepossessed in favour of the handsome prince, and in the charm of a meeting which wore the air of romance. She consented on their parting in the valley beneath D'Usson, that she would see him again, if it were only for the purpose of his exhibiting the proofs of his intended divorce from Margaret, and that his honour might be thus made clear to the lovely Chatelaine. That she kept her word—that their confidence grew daily—the vision which Jean La Roche beheld from the ladder is sufficing proof.

Nothing was more opportune to the wishes of Navarre than the arrival of Margaret at D'Usson; yet to Gabrielle it was a matter of self-reproach that she was entertaining, as a lover, the husband of the Queen. The forcible possession of the fortress, however, changed the feelings of its former mistress, who did not now check her emotions of secret triumph over the boast of the Louvre: the hospitality of her father had been outraged—but what a triumph! when the day arrived which would place the crown of Navarre on the head of his daughter.

The almost forgotten track to the summit of the rock was the path by which the Huguenot leader gained the bower of his sweet mistress; but who could paint the alarm of the lovers when the head of the arquebusier was seen

peeping through the lattice, and his voice heard jarringly on their pleasant discourse.

But when the peasant-clad Prince looked down, and beheld the number of the troop below—and Gabrielle, who flew to the window, half conscious that her father was at hand, heard his voice in angry expostulation with La Roche—both Navarre and the lady were at their wits' end. No time was to be lost: it was essential to the honour of the lady that the soldier's eyesight should be accounted deceptive, and the Prince was hidden ere the Marquis gained the chamber of his daughter.

De Cœuvres, as we have shown, was imposed on successfully. After De Nevailles had left the Marquis with his friends, the old noble was obliged to declare to such of the troops below as were still alive, the unfortunate result of the attempt: commanding them to return to the valley. When he retired to rest, Navarre was released from his place of concealment; a temporary ladder constructed; and the Prince escaped by the way he had entered.

The negotiations which subsequently ensued between himself and his Queen, realized the hopes he had so much at heart; and when intelligence arrived that De Cœuvres and his daughter were at Blois, life became wearisome, till he had gained an opportunity of seeing her once more with the happy news of his speedy release.

Thus was the obscure Father Anselm, the cordelier monk, in the presence of his Huguenot friends, a warrior and a Prince, scheming future conquests, and planning new designs against his enemies; in the presence of Gabrielle, a lover awaiting the happy hour to throw himself and his fortunes at her feet.

When the Baron De Nevailles, on the morning subsequent to his humiliating reception, related to the Count De Grammont and his politic friend the fruits of his private interview with the Queen, they were overjoyed at the favourable result of the conference; and in return for this piece of good news acquainted him with the quality of the humble secretary of Father Roquelaure.

"Ah! you did wrong to allow his Majesty to come hither," exclaimed the favourite of Catherine, "the captivating scenes which meet his eyes in this gay abode, will bring on the old fit of luxury and sloth. I doubt not you have had trouble enough to restrain him within the limits of ecclesiastical demeanour, and the close secrecy which

perforce must be adopted to prevent his well-known face from being recognised."

"In God's will! he is all our own," cried De Grammont.

"Is Madame De Sauves at Blois?" asked De Nevailles.

"For a young man you are the most suspicious I ever met with," exclaimed De Rosny rather sharply—seeing that the Baron was not inclined to put faith in the good character of his liege. "Madame De Sauves is at Blois, Monseigneur! Here in the palace, actively intriguing, as I have discovered, but only for the furtherance of the plots of the Leaguer Guise, whose creature she now is."

"And does her Majesty know of it?" asked the Baron, smiling.

"It is the common talk," replied De Rosny, "I spoke of it to her—and she laughed, and said that Guise might as well look through a sieve as into the magic mirror of De Sauves' pretty face, for Madame D'Usez had instructed the Dutchess D'Espernon *née Comtesse Candales*, to disclose fictitious intelligence to De Sauves, which would mislead the Protector."

"I begin to feel already at home," said De Nevailles, turning on his heel; "so you are in the confidence of our lady of the Louvre."

"Even so," replied De Rosny, "but where will this end?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Count De Grammont.

"I have often thought of you, Count, amid these plottings," said De Nevailles in a jocular mood; "but are they not preferable to the cruelty which formerly characterized the proceedings of the court? think only of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, a name which makes the blood run cold in the veins of our honest burgesses of Rochelle! Ah! and what quiet modes our lady of the Louvre and her son Charles adopted to get rid of a troublesome gentleman of the court—a pretender to the favour of Mademoiselle Elizabeth, or her sister, our gracious Queen of Navarre! How different since the peaceful *Henri de Valois* succeeded to the sceptre of his fierce brother. I would as soon have trusted myself to the waters of Biscay in a cooper's tub, as have come within the clutches of Catherine, if Charles, of happy memory, had been alive. Now every thing is decided by expediency and without violence, unless it be absolutely necessary. I am of more use alive than dead,

to the Queen of France, therefore I still exist. If the hero of St. Bartholomew had been living and in the saloon, when I entered, he would have frowned, hung his head on one side, like an idiot, as was his custom when any person or event displeased him, whispered a few words to a complaisant noble—and ere the next day's sun illumined the roof of the chateau, my corse would have been discovered on the staircase, or in the gardens, or, if decency were the whim of the moment, floating down the Loire."

"You speak truly," said De Grammont, "I heard one ask this morning if you were yet placed in custody—and upon the questioner receiving a reply in the negative, he said Villeroi had grown dilatory."

Then followed a mutual explanation of their respective views, with respect to the policy to be adopted towards Catherine, to force her to fulfil the conditions of the treaty which she had herself proposed to the Huguenots. De Grammont showed himself excessively angry at the continual delays which occurred.

"She will wait till the opening of the States, ere she signs a single article," said De Nevailles, "and if she can make favourable terms with Guise, even at the sacrifice of ourselves, we shall assuredly be sent back to the place we came from—that Monseigneur may rely on—but you may trust to the pride and strength of the Protector that he will not submit to conditions, unless such as would be humiliating, beyond endurance, to the court. It will be a death-struggle! but bear with her Majesty's character. My policy has ever been that of the creeping ivy, which pliantly bends out of its course to humour every excrescence and projection of the tree it embraces, yet glides into the hollows and curves, from which it cannot be displaced without injury to the trunk. This is the secret of my power—the secret of my being at this moment free."

"We expect much from your presence, Baron," said De Rosny, "but let us now seek Father Anselm."

Roquelaure was lodged in the northern angle of the chateau, in a pleasant chamber which overlooked a portion of the city, and the woods which skirted the road to Paris.

Here, in a deep-bayed window, was to be seen the cordelier's secretary busily engaged in writing to his friends; and here we must leave De Rosny and his brother agents to canvass with their leader the course to be pursued on the morrow, at the opening of the States.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

O wretched land, if his outrageous pride,
His cruell and untempred wilfulnesse,
His deepe dissembling shewes of false pretence,
Should once attaine the crowne———

* * * * *

Who seeth not now how many rising mindes
Do feede their thoughts, with hope to reach a realme?
And who will not by force attempt to winne
So great a gaine that hope perswades to have?

GORBODUC.

THE ensuing morning saw the Duke of Guise, like a skilful general, marshalling his forces for the dreaded battle. He was confident in his own strength; but there was enough of danger in the artful manœuvring of Catherine, as well as in the loyalty which yet retained a hold in the hearts of many of the deputies, to inspire him with a prudential fear for the result; an apprehension sufficiently strong to cause him to neglect nothing which might operate in his favour without inspiring either himself or his followers with distrust.

The Protector of the Laegue was now in the very zenith of his power. Did he desire a court? A train of nobles in semblance of royalty? Behold the dignitaries of the church; Archbishops, Cardinals, lordly Abbots, and influential preachers crowded his levee! Did he desire an army? Behold the numerous band of nobles who tendered their lives and fortunes in his cause, or to speak more correctly, in their own! When the busy thoughts which crowded his soul allowed a short interval of repose—a moment's breathing time to look into himself—and also to look around and survey the base of that power, of which he was the apex—the summit of the pyramid—he felt more than mortal, a demi-god, a superior influence, to which even the Church bowed lowly—a Jupiter *tonans*, issuing forth his dread bolts to exterminate the olden corrupt Saturnial dynasty of France.

His very wishes were anticipated; the glance of his eye sought after, as though its gaze were healsome to the infirmities of humanity. He moved abroad in a circle of friends, who supported him as the rich setting of the ring encircles the gem.

Michael Angelo has represented the Almighty, the Giver of Life, as a powerless old man borne on the wings and shoulders of his angels! Daring enough to shadow forth the image of his Maker, could his imagination have selected a more appropriate from? What power of limb! What energy of muscle! could the artist profanely have attributed to Him, whose arm directed the sun in its course? Whose will was law!

But can the human mind conceive through the sense of vision—the only sense to which the painter can appeal—a more striking exemplification of power, than that of a feeble old man, blind, powerless—not an arm stretched forth—not an eye with its lightning glance—and yet borne by the heavenly host of attendant angels—his ministers—the exponents of His will—those to whom he said, "Let it be done,"—"And it was done, even as he willed it."

Could Michael Angelo have painted more potently the influence of Will to the sensuous human race? That race which obeys the rod, the scourge, the sword, the eye of command, and the threatening voice!

In a lesser degree, so moved the Protector of the League; the clergy, the noblesse, the burgesses of France, were the humble ministrants of his will;—the inferior intelligences who bore him onward in his triumphant career!—the slaves who lay in waiting to execute his wishes, and save him from every labour but that of thought.

His chief partisan was the Archbishop of Lyons, a hot-headed prelate, who had been preferred by the Queen-mother, and now repaid the debt of gratitude by attempting to deprive her son of his birthright. It was the joint care of the prelate with the Chevalier D'Aumale to ascertain the sentiments of each deputy of the Tiers-Etat; and that they had the gratifying task of reporting to the Protector, that a majority of the deputies was disposed to support him to the extent of his ambition.

With such a formidable engine at command, Guise had nought to fear; and he arrayed himself in his garb of office, as Grand Master of the Palace, with a delight which he had never felt before. The toil of ambition leaves its victim but little time to reflect on his own greatness, or to sun himself in the paradise of his own power; ere he has gained the summit of the elevation for which he has laboured, fresh difficulties present themselves in his path; glimpses of distant glades and shady bowers as the chariot

of his destiny hurries on its course is all that he reaps for his labour—and the car of triumph at length reaches the shores of the waters of oblivion, just as the hero is asking himself whether the goal of happiness be yet won!

Yet Henry of Lorraine felt one hour of unmixed pleasure ere he descended to the hostile arena of political strife. He was in his dressing closet. The sun threw its slant beams on the rich cloak of dark velvet, which had often graced his manly from, and which reminded its illustrious owner of the bright eyes which followed him in his path—he heard the stir and the tumnlt of the lordly feet which paced the hall, and his bosom heaved with pride as he thought of the haughty prelates who bowed obsequious to his will—his ears were greeted with the neighing of steeds, the clang of the martial clarion, the shouts of the multitude—and the blood flowed gaily through his veins, as though it had been nourished with celestial food.

The Grand Master of the Palace of the kings of France, surrounded by his most faithful adherents, met the humiliated monarch at the principal entrance of the Chateau de Blois, and conducted him to the detached edifice in the court-yard of the castle, where the deputies had been summoned to meet their colleagues.

While the heralds are marshalling the illustrious visiters, let us, with the reader's permission, show him the interior. The hall of the States was a spacious chamber of quadrangular shape, its width scarcely one-third of the length. The entrance was beneath a gallery. On the opposite side, at a considerable distance from the wall, stood a range of pillars which supported the roof; these were covered from the ceiling to the floor with violet-coloured velvet sprinkled with fleur-de-lis of gold. Between the third and fourth pillars, much wider apart than the others, was a large dais or scaffold, on an elevation of several steps; the centre occupied by another ascent of a single step; here were placed the chairs of Valois and the Queen-mother.

Beneath the dais was a space environed by a barrier several feet in height, within which were seats and benches for the deputies of the three Estates. In the gallery, occupied by ladies, was an open window looking into the court-yard of the palace; at this post stood an usher, who summoned each deputy successively from the crowd awaiting admission. He was received at the entrance of the barrier by the heralds of Dauphiny, Bretagne, Normandy,

D'Alençon, and Valois, and by them handed over to the Sieurs De Rhodes and De Marles, masters of the ceremonies, who seated him in his allotted place.

Every deputy had taken his seat ere a flourish of trumpets announced the entry of Valois and his royal parent, the Grand Master and the chiefs of the household. Instantly the clergy and the noblesse arose and continued standing, while the burgesses, to the same tune, dropped on their knees, from which they did not arise till royalty had seated itself.

The *coup d'œil* of the assembly was the most imposing and august sight which France could present to her children. On the centre dais was seated the sovereign in his robes of state; on his right hand sat the Queen; in their rear stood the guard of two hundred gentlemen, armed with axes and formidable halberds; while on each side of their Majesties, and kneeling on a cushion, was seen a herald habited in his tabard of velvet and gold.

But the object of greatest attraction in the eyes of all beholders was the Grand Master, who sat in a chair on the lower dais with his back to their Majesties, and his face towards the deputies. Beneath the scaffold was a table at which was seated the secretary Villeroi, with his fellow-labourers of the cabinet, Boilieu and Revol. Beyond the barrier, the hall was crowded with the citizens of Blois and strangers; while the gallery was graced with the presence of the ladies of the court and the foreign ambassadors, from the turbanned Turk and furred Pole to the proud envoy of England, who quartered his mistress's arms with those of France.

When all was silent, and the business of the State about to open, the Duke was observed to look slowly round the assembly, his eye glancing first at the extreme right, and travelling from deputy to deputy, as if to assure them by his firm and confident gaze that he expected each to do the duty to which he had privately pledged himself. It was the eye of a general measuring the strength of friends and foes; and as its owner, satisfied with the scrutiny, threw himself back in his chair, a smile of delight played over his lips. He then arose, and turning to Valois, declared the States to be opened.

The monarch, who had been, successively, the chivalric Duke D'Anjou, the feeble King of Poland, the superstitious yet mild sovereign of France, the pedant and man of let-

ters, the rhetorician and versifier, who amused himself with the poets Pibrac and Ronsard, while the Queen-mother was watching the growth of the infant League, now a terrible monster, arose with a pale face and agitated mien. He narrated to the States an abstract of his own career; he showed the condition of the kingdom, when Providence had called upon him to assume the regal sway—he painted the condition and character of each party and faction which had disturbed the peace of his country; and as he dwelt on the arrogance and bigotry of the priesthood—the grasping oppression of the noblesse—the ignorance and monk-led fury of the commonalty, his voice grew louder, his stature more erect, his thoughts bolder, and the style of his harangue more eloquent, satiric, and convincing. Indignation had lent him its power, and placed within his mastery the stored materials of a mind not deficient either in imagination or erudition. The assembly was astonished—the partisans of Guise and the League looked at each other uneasily, apprehensive that the *exposé* of the monarch would rouse a hidden feeling in his favour—the clergy felt abashed, and hung down their heads to conceal the vexation which troubled their hearts, thus laid open by a cunning and skilful hand. He concluded, amid the loud plaudits of his subjects beyond the barrier, and of those within the gallery, an harangue which for eloquence and skilful peroration and detail, had never been approached, far less equalled by any former cion of royalty.

The silence which ensued was broken by the vehement Archbishop of Lyons, who, stung with rage at the attack on his order, and alarmed at the prospect of returning loyalty which it might effect, arose, and in a voice discordant and broken by passion, begged that his Majesty would retract words spoken in the heat of discourse; that if the address were allowed to go forth to his subjects in its present form, it would be the cause of endless confusion.

"If his Majesty be asked to retract his words, it would have been far better if Monseigneur and his friends had informed him beforehand what to say!" cried Catherine.

Lyons replied arrogantly that he did not think her Majesty had any right to meddle with the business of the States—that it was contrary to the spirit of the Salique law.

"If such were the spirit of the law," rejoined the Queen, with a look of contempt, "where would have been your

rochet? Was it not ourself, as Regent of this kingdom for his Majesty's lamented brother, who preferred you to your see? If the law allow not our taking share in the councils of the State, your preferment must have been illegal and irregular! We should be sorry—very sorry!" continued Catherine, in a calm satiric tone; "that our good lieges of Lyons were deprived of Monseigneur's holy ministrations! Even the law itself would be blamed by his flock smarting under their irreparable loss!"

The Archbishop received the rebuke in silence; far otherwise was it with the furious and enthusiastic preacher, Lincestre, who arose in his place behind the prelates, and cried out in a loud voice—

"Glad as a martyr should I be, O Queen! if the earth should give way beneath the feet of the arch-promoters of heresy—the encouragers of the damnable Calvinists—ay—though I, a poor servant of the church, should not escape from the wicked tie which has bound me to the falling corruption!"

"The simile is not appropriate, father!" said Catherine, —say, rather, that you were a leech caught from stagnant ponds—that you stuck to the royal monarch of the Louvre until satiated by a rich abbey—but then, full-blooded, you fell away, loathing the giver of the bounty!"

"O! Evil day for France," ejaculated the preacher.

"O! Evil day for the honour of French gentlemen, if they allow our presence to be thus insulted," exclaimed Catherine. "Messeigneurs!" continued she, addressing the assembly, "is this your foremost advocate!"

This appeal had the desired effect, and the preacher was silenced. But this skirmishing was not to the taste of the Protector. He resolved to settle the disputed point; and declared that it would accrue to the good of France if his Majesty were permitted to give to the nation his speech, even as it was uttered, without the least alteration, so that all might read their sovereign's mind; the good Catholic taking note with sorrow of the aspersions thrown on those, who stood forward in the defence of their faith; and the heretic gloating over the immunity and sanction which heresy would receive by the discomfiture of its enemies.

"Let France hear the Grand Master's scheme of pacification!" cried Valois, giving to the Protector the opportunity he desired.

The Duke of Guise, who had sat down at the conclusion of his previous remarks, arose at the bidding of Valois, and casting a glance of triumph around the assembly, began an elaborate oration, laying down his premises very calmly, yet increasing in warmth as he proceeded, till having fully strung the hearts of friends in beating unison with his own, he launched out into a bold attack on the policy pursued by the Louvre—artfully, the while, picturing his own conduct, in the colour of a saviour of his country, and of his country's religion. Having worked up the minds of the deputies by his eloquence to the proper pitch, he proposed that the assembly should agree to an enactment, which alone could bring the nation to a peaceful and happy state, and which consisted of two primary and essential conditions:—that the decrees of the Council of Trent be received by France—and that Henry, Duke of Vendôme, and King of Navarre, be excluded from the succession.

These articles were received by the assembly with loud tokens of assent. The archbishop, after exchanging glances with the Protector, arose, and declared the necessity of another condition;—that his Majesty should appoint a successor.

To the dismay of Valois and the Queen-mother, the proposal was received with deafening shouts. But the simple-minded Marquis De Cœuvres, who had listened to the proceedings with great earnestness, now arose to ask the Protector and his clerical coadjutor, who it was they desired should be appointed successor. This homely question produced considerable laughter, but the Duke evaded it by saying, that he should live to see his Majesty blessed with a noble consort, and he hoped a numerous line of princes; and that the article proposed was only a measure of precaution in case of failure of issue.

"And I hope so too," replied the Marquis, "for I have been at Blois but a short time, yet I have heard from the mouths of many, that an illustrious lady, a friend of yours, Monseigneur, keeps by her a pair of golden scissors, which she declares is to put into shape his Majesty's tonsure, when he takes the vows."

This allusion to Montpensier created considerable mirth, and many a glance was bent upward to the gallery; but the Dutchess was not present.

"How can the King of Navarre be excluded from the

succession," said Catherine, when the laughter had subsided, "his right being so strongly based on the oldest law of the kingdom? Ask Monsigneur De Lyons if the Salique law of inheritance is to be violated."

This sarcasm nettled the Archbishop exceedingly; but Guise made a sign to him not to speak, and rising himself said; "By these acts can he be excluded!"—and thereupon uttered a long string of charges both civil and religious, the chief of which were rebellion and heresy.

"But how are these to be proved in the absence of the accused?" exclaimed Valois.

"There needs no proof," replied Guise, amid the plaudits of his friends; "every one now present, who fought at Coutras, has evidence sufficient to condemn him. Who will gainsay the treason and the heresy of the apostate Navarre?"

"I will!" shouted the Count De Grammont, rising in a fury: "I deny his treason! I fought at Coutras, and was grieved that I could not find the Duke of Guise on the field. And I, now in the name of the Duke De Vendôme, and King of Navarre, and Prince of Bearn, and whatever other titles he may possess—God be praised! he is worthy of them!—protest against the passing of such an unjust law; and moreover, in the name of the King of Navarre, I challenge his accuser to a trial at arms!"

"*Deo volente!*" whispered De Rosny to his friend.

"*Deo volente!*" shouted the Count.

"The King of Navarre is a very prudent man," said Guise, sarcastically, "to stay at home and send a deputy to fight his battles."

"He shall wield his own lance!" cried De Grammont.

"Monseigneur!" exclaimed the Grand Master, in a tone of sarcastic condescension, "the fourteenth century has been long buried with our ancestors—the stroke of a lance or sword cannot make a good Catholic out of a vile heretic, or even drive out the spirit of rebellion from a disaffected heart. The King of Navarre will be always the king of Navarre, and nothing higher is he capable of! The honest citizens of France have cast him off long since, and the enactment which we now propose passing, is but an echo of the sentiment which dwells in every true Catholic's breast."

"For my own part, most illustrious Prince," said the Marquis De Cœuvres, again rising, "I would never obey

a heretic on the throne of France; but I think the poor sinful King of Navarre ought to be invited to meet us, before we proceed to exclude him from the succession. Whether we have power to change the law or not, I believe firmly, that if his Majesty were brought from Rochelle, or whatever other abode of heresy he is now dwelling in, and were placed under the tuition of the holy cardinals and bishops now assembled, they would soon induce him to become a good Catholic."

"That old fool serves us more adroitly than all the wisdom of our cabinet," said Catherine in a whisper to her son.

"No better course could be followed than that proposed by Monsigneur the Governor of D'Usson," said Valois aloud. "Let us summon our cousin Navarre to the States."

"And for what!" exclaimed Guise, in an indignant tone: —"Is it, that he may again scandalize our faith by a second apostacy? Did he not profess himself a convert to our holy faith till it suited his purpose to throw off the mask after the death of his late Majesty, who would never have tolerated heresy in his palace? Heresy, as all our holy fathers have inculcated, is a rank poisonous weed that must be rooted out——"

"Is this the way, Monseigneur," asked Catherine, interrupting the Protector of the League, "to heal the wounds of the state?"

A mixed murmur of approbation and vehement disapproval of the royal interruption followed the question of her Majesty; and Guise, who had played the part of a man of moderation long enough to grow tired of the discourse, resolved to put forth his strength, and carry every thing after his own desire.

"That were an office, certainly, befitting your Majesty's ancestor," said he, replying insolently to the proposal of the Queen-mother; "soldiers and gentlemen cannot so deport themselves."

This allusion to the calling of the first of the De Medicis, who had been a Florentine apothecary, galled their proud descendant excessively. She turned pale with rage, but prudence did not forsake her; and believing that the insult would cause a diversion in her favour, she told the deputies that they had better entertain her son's advice, and summon the King of Navarre, that he might question the Duke of Guise respecting the allegation advanced by

the latter. The term 'question' threw the Protector into a fury.

"Ah! Heresy question the true faith!" exclaimed he.

"If at fault you might call in Madame De Sauves to your aid!" cried the Queen-mother, who could no longer forbear giving vent to the anger which his insult had originated.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" chuckled De Cœuvres; "then the story I have heard is true——" but the remainder of the governor's words were lost in the tumult of laughter, which proceeded alike from friend and foe of the archleaguer, who now glared upon the assembly with an aspect that indicated the tempest struggling within.

At length, starting up, he stretched forth both his hands toward the assembly with an air of commanding action.

"Am I a mark for insult?" exclaimed he. "Am I a butt for heresy, licentiousness, and atheism to cast their shafts at? Am I the man, O Catholics, whom you have chosen as your leader? If I be disgraced, is it fit that I retain the title of Protector of your holy faith? Am I fit to be the representative of the Catholic church? No! I resign the title! No longer am I your Protector."

With all his fierce impetuosity and untamed ambition, there was a groundwork of prudence and good sense in the mind of the Grand Master of the Palace; up to the present moment, he had dallied with his power, desirous that his ends should be seemingly accomplished rather by the nature of circumstances than his own overt acts or the violence of his partisans; but the remembrance of Catherine's triumph and his own mistake in the affair of the barricades came seasonably to his mind, and dreading lest the subtlety of his enemy should again foil his strong intent, he silenced the cries of his friends; and in a firm voice called upon the secretary Revol to read aloud the articles embracing the exclusion of Navarre from the throne, and the necessity of Valois appointing a successor.

Catherine was but too well convinced that if she suffered these articles to pass the votes of the assembly, it would only pave the way for the ultimatum of the faction of the League, which was to despose her son, and shut him up in a monastery, in order to make room for their idol. There remained, however, but one mode of escaping these fatal laws, in an assembly, the majority of which was pre-

pared to vote for any measure which the chief of the League proposed. She whispered a few words to Valois.

No sooner had Revol ceased reading the articles, than the king stepped forward, and adjourned the States, allowing them an interval of four days' rest.

This communication fell like a thunderbolt on the Protector, in his career of triumph; he fairly staggered, and caught hold of the chair for support, but immediately recovering his presence of mind, he exclaimed in a loud voice, "France cannot consent to the adjournment!"

"France requires that the Grand Master should marshal the way home to the Palace of his sovereign!" replied Valois with look and speech of more kingly dignity than had ever been witnessed to him.

The Grand Master, however, took no heed of the duties of his office, but descended from the dais, and commenced an earnest conversation with the Cardinals and dignitaries of the church; while the deputies of the three estates, talking all together, and at once, stamping, swearing, each waving his cap and gesticulating after the fashion of his countrymen, which mingling with the vociferations of five hundred or more of brethren, gave the spectators in the gallery a more picturesque image of the confusion at Babel, than that which was figured on the tapestry on the wall behind the pillars.

Valois and his royal parent did not hold it safe to pass through the crowd of their excited enemies; with the assistance of the gentlemen of the guard, they descended from the dais in the rear, and sought a joyful egress from the assembly by winding round the barrier among the strangers and townsmen.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Ah, noble prince! how oft have I beheld
Thee mounted on thy fierce and trampling stede,
Shining in armour bright before the tilt,
And with thy mistresse sleve tied on thy helme,
And charge thy staffe, to please thy ladie's eye,
That bowed the head peece of thy friendly foe!
How oft in armes on horse to bend the mace,
How oft in armes on foot to breake the sworde,
Which never now these eyes may see againe.

FERREX AND PORREX.

No description could faithfully depict the rage of Montpensier when her brother returned to his palace, and acquainted her with the untoward conclusion of the meeting of the States. Although the Protector, with circumstantial minuteness, detailed the proceedings of the assembly, and explained the obvious impossibility of forcing the States to act in violation of the laws on which hung their very existence—that it was worse than useless for the deputies to attempt passing an enactment after the assembly had been prorogued, and their existence consequently in abeyance till the ensuing Saturday—still Madame Montpensier, could not believe otherwise, than that her brother had committed another fatal error of courtesy or mistaken honour. She awaited with impatience the arrival of the Archbishop of Lyons, who came with the Count De Brissac, an influential Leaguer, and several others of equal note, to condole with the Duke on his disappointment, and to take counsel together, and agree on a course of action which might prevent a repetition of the same disaster.

To the Archbishop, who was known to be a man of uncompromising temper, and not likely to excuse the Duke for any lapse of action, she listened with attention, and fortunately for the domestic peace of the Protector, became at length convinced that he had at least carried his policy as far as his friends judged prudent.

"Father," exclaimed she, "I would have held the monkish king in the chair! did I not receive from the mouths of as many as four-fifths of the deputies, their promise to adopt any measure which might come either from yourself or my brother? And for men, who account themselves the wisest and strongest in France to submit to such a creature as the

thing which yet holds in its hands the sceptre of the kingdom!"

When a woman like Montpensier, of violent temper, lofty ambition, and implacable hatred, meddles in political affairs, she cannot reconcile to her own daring policy the caution and apparent pusillanimity of conduct which characterize the proceedings of men even as ambitious and courageous as herself. When a page or domestic offends her, she inflicts summary vengeance—when a guest render himself obnoxious, instant banishment is his lot—no where in her own natural sphere does she meet with let or hindrance to the accomplishment of her desires. But it is otherwise with statesmen and political chiefs, who, in aiming a blow at the influence or existence of their rivals, have to study their own reputation together with a cautious approach to, and passage through, the moral defences which surround their victim.

"Wait, daughter, but four days longer," said the churchman, laying his fingers on her arm, "and we will escort you in triumph to the Chateau De Blois! Your brother, through the power of the Church, and the good-will of pious Catholics, is King of Paris already. Though he marches not as quickly as a woman's thoughts, yet he never loses the grasp of what he has once seized. Neither does his ally, the Church, move after the fashion of a crab, though many foolish men attempt to say, that the sprinkling of hellish doctrines which has of late fallen on Christendom, will deprive the Church of much of her vitality. While the poisonous weed is nurtured humbly it is unnoticed, but when it makes head against its neighbour—— Ah! you laugh, daughter!—you understand me. I do assure you, Madame, that I am much pleased with the success of the heretic, Navarre—his pretensions will not droop till the friends of the Church do, in their indignation, exterminate the Calvinists root and branch from out of the soil of France. Happy am I, that the cunning Queen-mother had courage to invite her Huguenot friends. There has just arrrived another at the chateau—the much talked of Baron De Nevailles—and wondrous to relate—he is discovered to be none other than Villa Franca, the lost minion of the royal descendant of apothecaries! See, daughter, what disasters befall our enemies! to place, forsooth, her confidence in an enemy unwittingly."

"My brother almost died of laughter at the relation of

Madame De Sauves, who reported to him the arrival of the young man," said Montpensier, smiling.—"Poor Catherine! I wish I had been present when they met, though she wanted not the presence of an enemy to add to her mortification.

It had been the custom of Guise and the principal Leaguers, for some time previous to the assembly of the States, to attend daily at the King's council-chamber, that they might confer with his secretaries and advisers, or if his Majesty were so disposed, with himself. No good had resulted from these conferences, neither was it intended by the Protector, that any other effect should attend them, than a continuance of his reputation for moderation and desire of healing the wounds of the state.

Notwithstanding the angry termination of the meeting of the States, the subsequent morning saw the Duke, as usual, attended by a train of gentlemen, repair to the chateau to hear fresh proposals, and to utter replies, as little likely to bring about peace as their precursors of the former week. Wednesday morning witnessed the same duplicity; and the conference on Thursday was attended with but little variation, save that at the foot of the grand staircase in the chateau, the Duke was solicited by a captain of his Majesty's guard and a number of the soldiers, to interest himself for the men, who, owing to the wretched state of the royal finances, were in great distress, on account of their families, having received no pay for many months; and as the captain declared, Monseigneur having great weight with his Majesty and the council, a word from him would do much for men who had often attended his footsteps, and obeyed his commands in happier times. Guise, being aware of the truth of what they averred, promised to recommend their case to the council above.

On his return from the council, Montpensier in great alarm related a report which had been mysteriously circulating in the city; and which, if true, indicated a hostile attempt on his life by the agents of the king.

From whence the report had originated, or by whom set afloat, was equally unknown: but the noxious whisper had spread from mouth to mouth, till it had created an atmosphere of alarm and suspicion. The Dutchess conjured her brother to stay away from the council on the morrow, as his visit to the chateau was the only opportunity open to his enemies to attack him with advantage. Guise, who

was neither influenced by fear, nor above the exercise of prudential caution, replied, that he would be guided by his friends, who were to meet on the morrow, being Friday morning, and repair with him in great show and state to the Palace to attend, for the last time, the morning conference.

"My own opinion, and you know, Catherine," said he smiling, "that I am not foolhardy, is, that the whisper is set afloat by the Court, as its last chance, in order to drive me from Blois—or to prevent me attending the States. If the intent were true, your namesake would have taken excellent care to prevent her resolve from travelling about the city as widely as an ordinary matter of scandal."

On entering his chamber, he beheld a sealed letter lying for his perusal; it was to the same purport as the report which his sister had recounted; and it concluded by warning him to take especial care of his life, as Valois meditated depriving him of it.

"He durst not," exclaimed the Duke, writing these words on the letter and replacing it on the table, for the observation of those who had deposited it there; that they might become aware of the discredit he attached to the communication.

The next morning brought with it a crowd of friends anxious to embody themselves among the train which daily accompanied him to the Palace. To the most confidential of these, he spoke of the hostile rumour which had got abroad, and asked their opinions concerning it. The Count De Brissac advised him to refrain from trusting himself in the power of his enemies; the preacher Lincestre followed on the same side; but the Archbishop laughed at the affair as a device of the enemy.

During the discussion, the Duke De Mayenne, brother of Guise and Montpensier, and a soldier of great promise recently returned from Italy, equalled only in military reputation by his statesmanlike sagacity and penetration, entered the saloon where the Leaguers were assembled. Upon being questioned as to the degree of credit which ought to be attached to the suspicious whisper, he, without previous communication with the Archbishop, spoke to nearly the same effect as the prelate:—

"Have you not constantly perceived," said he "the balancing, cautious policy of Catherine? Do we not know for a certainty, as far indeed as a human being's heart can

be known, that the Queen-mother is bitterly inimical—I would even say, conscientiously inimical—to the Huguenots, and only favours them that they may hang on France as a counterpoise to our power? Has she taken one decided step either on one side or other, since the death of our friend Charles? Has it not been her constant aim to cajole the Huguenots—to allow us to grin at them through our barred iron—and behold! when lance is in rest, and spur in horse's flank—out steps the gentle lady of the Louvre, and places herself between us and our holy revenge? Is this the woman to bring down on her head the severest indignation, and the most deadly revenge which the nation would exact, were its Protector and favourite violently cut off? For certain, the rumour flew from the Palace; and a pretty *ruse de guerre* it is. Will my brother Henry mount horse for Paris, and leave the wily lady to triumph to-morrow on the steps of the dais—or will he go with us to the council-chamber, and put our lady in despair of a new stratagem?"

"In God's name, we will go to council, brother," exclaimed Guise with a firm voice.

The cortege had scarcely departed an hour, ere Montpensier, who had been present at the discussion, and was, if not convinced, at least silenced by the arguments of her brother and the Archbishop, was informed, that a peasant desired to speak to her on private business; but that he would not communicate what he was in quest of to others.

"Then let him enter," said the masculine Princess, who feared neither peasant or prince.

The Dutchess saw enter a tall thin wild-looking being with a grin on his wrinkled countenance, which, however, she could not interpret either into pleasure, fear, or surprise.

"Your name, *bon homme*, if you have one?" said Montpensier, on beholding the peasant looking about like one bewildered.

"Is the Duke here—may I not speak to such a great Prince?" exclaimed the peasant, seemingly inclined to treat the Dutchess with as little attention as if she were a serving-woman.

The page who followed him into the chamber, explained to the Dutchess that he had told the man that Monseigneur had left the hotel—that he had in his possession a letter for the Duke, but would not give it up; but which he thought,

Madame might extract from him. Madame indignantly demanded why they had not taken away the letter, and beaten the insolent *villain* till he could not stand; but the page replied, that they were obliged to deal cunningly, for he was very strong, and had plucked up Jean, and thrown him on a cornice projecting over the gateway.

The lady, hearing this account of his prowess, though it prudent to deal cunningly also; and told the peasant, who was looking about as if he suspected the Duke were hidden somewhere, that the Protector was at the King's palace, and that if he had any letter for him, she, being his sister, would take care of it.

It was our old friend, Lous Le Lupin, who had been thus introduced into the presence of Montpensier; and upon hearing what the Dutchess said, the suspicion which he had entertained that there was a conspiracy among the household to prevent him seeing and speaking to his great friend, to whom he had of yore rendered such important services, was wholly dissipated; and he presented the letter to *Madame* without further solicitation.

"And from whom came this?" asked the lady.

"From Father Antoine, of the convent of the holy Capuchins in the king's garden," replied Louis, in a tone of affected importance.

"Then it is on the business of our holy League," exclaimed Montpensier, opening the letter.

It was a note of warning from the Capuchin, who, from his proximity to the palace, had observed that the gardens were that morning patrolled by the soldiers of the guard; and that several sentinels were lodged in the temple facing the convent. This unusual circumstance, the holy father declared was indicative of threatened evil; and he had, therefore, taken the precaution to advertise Monseigneur, the Duke, of the fact by the hands of the woodman, Louis Le Lupin, a sincere servant of the church, and trustworthy to the extent of his ability. Father Antoine apologized for not coming in person on account of the system of espionage which *Madame*, the Queen-mother, had directed to be observed toward the inmates of the convent.

"May the powers of hell seize both mother and son!" exclaimed Montpensier, when she had finished the perusal of this alarming epistle.

Her quick resolve was instantly put in execution. Commanding the page to keep secret her departure, she hastily

left the hotel accompanied by Louis, who she promised should both see and speak to his idol, the Duke. It was the custom for the friends of her brother, while he was with Valois and the cabinet, to await in the court of the castle, or on the landing of the staircase, till he came out of the council-chamber. Montpensier determined, so soon as she reached the palace, to alarm her friends—force an entry into the council—and bear away her brother out of the fangs of his enemies. That the Dutchess might not be recognised as she passed along the streets, she put on her mask, and by this means reached the chateau unobserved; the woodman full of pride and vanity striding after her with feet that scarcely seemed to touch the earth, so transported was he with the honour which awaited him.

"I cannot believe that that drivelling, foolish woman, who has been now two days on a bed of sickness, will attempt aught against *Henri!*" muttered Madame to herself, as she prepared to enter the court of the palace.

But we must now return to the Protector.

Accompanied by his brother, Mayenne, whose person and character will be the subject of future comment, the Count De Brissac, the Archbishop, Colonel St. Paul, and many others, of various rank and station, the Duke of Guise moved onward to the palace, amid the applause of the deputies congregated to do honour to his progress. The inhabitants of Blois did not join in the manifestations of delight evinced by his friends; on the contrary, they prided themselves on their loyalty—on the reputation which their city had acquired as the favourite residence of kings—and on the purity of their dialect, which they attributed to the frequent sojourn of the court.

"How different in feeling are the artisans and dial-makers of Blois from our good citizens of Paris!" exclaimed De Mayenne, addressing his brother, whom he observed to have become of a sudden dispirited.

"Their silence is, indeed, ominous to one who has fed on the breath of popularity like myself!" replied the Protector, in a gloomy tone of voice.

"Come! Come! Henri!" rejoined De Mayenne; "repeat the Roman's text, *odi profanum vulgus*, for once! And let us again frighten the silly Valois ere we withdraw the chair from beneath him!"

They had how arrived at the palace, and were received

by the ushers and officers of the guard with the honour befitting their rank.

At the head of the principal staircase of the chateau, there was a landing which served the purpose of an anteroom to the council-chamber. This latter apartment on ordinary occasions was open to the passage of the courtiers, but on council-days, none were admitted save those, who had the privilege of *entrée* to the cabinet. Upon entering the council-room from the landing place, the spectator beheld a door on the right hand, situated at the extremity of this spacious apartment; it opened into a tapestried chamber, or rather corridor; on the left was his Majesty's wardrobe room, and on the opposite side, the entrance to the royal closet; the doors of both were concealed behind the tapestry.

But we are anticipating the progress of the Duke, who was now only at the foot of the staircase. Here he was again accosted by the captain of the guard and his men; and he repeated his promise of interceding with the Secretaries of State for the relief of their necessities.

"This staircase and the landing above," said Guise to his friends, "may be truly called the hall of suppliants! Every one who has a suit to forward—or an object to gain—makes it his business to waylay the unfortunate man who happens to be of the council."

"The suppliants whom you have just spoken to," rejoined De Mayenne, "are more numerous than all the others—and they come in state too—with cuirass as bright as glass."

"Some one else pays for the polish," said Guise, laughing; "the royal treasury, I am sure, cannot afford it, unless *Madame*, the mother of kings, has pawned her jewels."

Only Guise, the Archbishop, De Brissac, and De Mayenne, were allowed to enter the council-chamber, the door of which was held by the guard of the king; the others dispersed themselves on the staircase, and loitered about the corridors, or wherever they listed.

Scarcely had the Protector with his associates entered the hall, when he was seized with a shivering fit, and led to the fire-place, glowing with embers, for the autumn had set in cold. He, however, speedily recovered, and being ashamed of his weakness, began to talk earnestly with the Secretary Beaulieu, M. De Villeroi, now somewhat in disgrace with Valois, and Alphonso De Corso, the Italian.

As the Duke De Mayenne had for the first time done himself, or his Majesty, the honour of attending the daily conference, Valois, in order to mark with distinction his visit, admitted him to the royal closet in preference to his more illustrious brother.

During his absence the arch-leaguer endeavoured to assume his wonted confidence, but in vain; there was something out of order in either body or mind which he could not account for; and though he joined apparently in the mirth of the Sieur De Beaulieu, who was jesting on the contents of a letter which he had received, and which reported that the Huguenot Viscount De Turrenne was laying close siege to the sister of the late Duke of Bouillon, and heiress of his estates and principality, yet was the Protector far from feeling a quietude of mind.

From this disagreeable state he was relieved by the reappearance of Charles De Mayenne, accompanied by the Secretary Revol, who stated his Majesty's request that he should repair to the closet.

"Is her Majesty there?" asked Guise.

"She has been ill of the gout these two days past, and cannot yet stir from her bed!" said De Mayenne, in a whisper to his brother.

Hereupon the Protector, bowing with his usual affability to the council, and to his own friends, disappeared by the door leading to the closet, which was closed after him, and locked by the usher in waiting on the council.

He found himself in the corridor communicating with the royal closet; a group of pages seated on a bench, whose faces were familiar to him, arose on his entrance, as it were in salutation.

Accustomed daily to the same office, he raised the tapestry, and was about to lay his hand on the door of the closet, when one of the pages drew his poniard, and raising it on high, drove it with all his strength into the breast of the victim; its dreadful plunge was the signal for his comrades to follow the example. The poor Leaguer uttered not a word—but heaved a sigh so profound that it made to tremble and stand aghast all the guilty wretches whose steel was bedewed with his illustrious blood.

Notwithstanding the wound which his body had received, the fiery soul of the Duke was not yet overpowered, and driven from its tenement; and though the assassins pressed upon him, and endeavoured to sway him to the floor, he

burst from their deadly embrace, and staggered toward the door of the council-chamber.

De Lognac, a royal page, who had not hitherto used his weapon, but stricken with terror at the vibrating frame of the Protector, had unconsciously dropped on one knee—now seeing the Duke approach with the aspect of a demon—with eyes starting from their sockets, arms extended and fists clenched in agony, and as it were about to wreak a dying vengeance on the kneeling page—in his alarm thrust forth his sheathed sword in defence; onward came the threatening form of the Leaguer, his breast and the sword met in contact, and he was precipitated to the floor by the simple, almost unconscious effort of the page. The Protector fell on the carpet nerveless,—lifeless, expiring immediately without a struggle.

But the disturbance had been heard in the council-chamber—the leaguers rushed wildly from their seats—and hurried to the door, anticipating but too justly the fate of their leader. It was locked, and the usher refused to surrender the key; but the agonized brother of the Protector, seizing the officer, dashed him against the wall—the key was plucked from his grasp—the door opened—and De Mayenne rushed in to behold the lifeless body of his brother;—alone on the floor—for the coward assassins had sought refuge in the closet of guilty royalty.

At this instant a scuffle was heard on the landing place—a shout of defiance mingled with a woman's scream—the strong door of the council-chamber sprung open with a crash—and Louis Le Lupin pierced with wounds fell over the threshold.

Montpensier, with the countenance and wild gesture of a fury—brandishing the steel which she had snatched from a feeble owner—and followed by many of the Leaguers, strode over the dying peasant, and rushed into the corridor.

"Who has done this frightful deed?" exclaimed the petrified preacher Lincestre.

"It was I—I!" gasped forth Charles De Mayenne, full of remorse for his fatal advice; and sunk down upon the body of his slaughtered brother.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Stand forth, transform'd Antonio, fully mued
From brown soar feathers of dull yeomanry,
To th' glorious bloom of gentry; prune yourself sleek;
Swear boldly y' are the man you represent,
To all that dare deny it.

ALBUMAZAR.

THUS terminated the proud career of the Protector of the League; and if the destiny of a man be estimated simply by the influence which he exercised over the affairs of his country, without regard either to the duration of his life, the happiness or misery which accrued to his lot, or the principles which guided his conduct, we may pronounce *Henri de Lorraine* to have been one of the most brilliant stars which ever illuminated the political firmament of the kingdom of France.

He died ignominiously, but he fell like a hero, striking terror into his coward enemies; even as the lion, circumvented by base toils, falls a sacrifice to a pigmy power, which scarcely dares approach the monarch of the forest, even while breathing forth his mighty heart.

To Valois must be ascribed the sole design of this stroke of expediency; neither Catherine, nor De Biron, nor any of the chief personages of the kingdom, had been consulted by the determined monarch; he worked alone in his scheme of release; when the opportunity for executing his resolve was at hand, he found great difficulty in procuring the necessary aid for its accomplishment; and to the number of the inferior officers of the household to whom he was forced to apply, ere he could induce any of them to become assassins, must be ascribed the warnings which smote ineffectually the ear of the Protector.

The descendant of St. Louis listened with suspended breath and trembling frame till the heavy fall of his rival announced the conclusion of the tragedy.

Fearful of meeting the dying gaze of his murdered enemy, he escaped from the closet by a back staircase which led to the quarter of the Palace occupied by the Queen-mother, who was stretched on a bed of sickness,

unable to control the actions of her son, or even to listen to his misdoings.

To the chamber of his sick parent he fled, trembling yet rejoicing, as one who has set fire to a train, yet fears its explosion. The conference which ensued was but short, for the Queen-mother was writhing with pain. Upon her son being conducted to her bed-side, he said in a tone of exultation, yet still tremulously, from the agitated nerves of his coward frame—

"Madame! The King of Paris lies dead at the door of my closet—I am now King of all France!"

"Have a care, Henri!" replied Catherine, her features convulsed with the violent effects of the disease, "that you be not very soon king of nothing!"

She could speak no more; and Valois, deprived of the advice or consolation of his parent—his ears still haunted with the sounds of death, although he had fled from the guilty spot—in his distraction sought the chamber of the Baron De Nevailles, whom he found alone; and to whom he related, in a hurried trembling voice, the catastrophe which had just occurred, extenuating his own conduct in the execution of the deed of slaughter.

"Either he or ourself must have fallen," said the unhappy monarch, "France could not be subject to two rulers! Not only yourself, Baron, but every man who has eyes to look around beyond his own interests, must have seen that the Leaguer aimed at nothing less than the destruction of ourself and the sovereignty of the house of Valois! If ever King had cause to commit an act of violence, such was my condition!"

"Your Majesty was indeed driven from the Palace of your ancestors," said the Baron.

"And yet, De Nevailles," rejoined Valois, "I have sinned deeply—my hands are stained with blood—I feel myself doomed! But hear me, Heaven!" continued the weak yet rash Prince, dropping on his knees,—"give me strength to expiate my crime in penance! Often have I wished to visit Palestine—to walk humbly over the sacred ground on which my Redeemer tarried during his earthly sojourn!"——

What farther the King spoke was uttered in a tone inaudible to the Baron; but suddenly starting up, the monarch exclaimed,—

"Yes! De Nevailles! Ourself and the penitential bre-

thren whose exercises you have witnessed, shall embark for a pilgrimage to Mount Carmel. I will order a ship to be ready at Marseilles."

"What! and leave the Leaguers to wreak their revenge on a sick parent guiltless of the crime!" cried the Baron. "The chief of an illustrious house to forsake the home of his ancestors when destructive vengeance hovers over the roof! Doubtless, Sire, you have committed a grievous crime—and do you imagine that Heaven will wipe away the offence for a prayer or two, or a pleasant jaunt to the Levant? But just now your Majesty confessed to me that you did evil to bring about good. If you have had courage to perform the guilty portion of your labour, why forsake the accomplishment of what ought to be the immediate step to regain peace of mind? Look, Sire, to the condition of your kingdom. Put yourself at the head of your army—call together the nobles who yet remain faithful to your house—vanquish the many evils of that serpent, whose head only has been bruised! Let peace reign once more in France, and discord cease between its sons—and may the peasant at his cheerful labour—the merchant at his industrious board—and the noble, whose lands are free from ravage, pray to Heaven to forgive their monarch for the sin he has committed."

"This is not the language of a heretic!" exclaimed the reviving monarch.

"The light from Heaven shines on all Christians equally," said De Nevailles; "but there are some men who look upon their neighbour, and see only the dark shadow which trails behind—and this, through malice or ignorance, they call heresy!"

At this moment the door of the apartment was flung open, and De Rosny entered with eager steps and excited features.

"It is as I predicted, De Nevailles," exclaimed the Huguenot, without noticing the King,—"Guise is slain— and the Leaguers are wheeling about like a disturbed rookery!"

"The more is my guilt!" cried Valois.

De Rosny was at first startled, but instantly recovering himself, said, "Guilt it certainly is to destroy the chief, and suffer the accomplices to escape! Does your Majesty suppose that the death of one man will root out the fibres of rebellion which have clung so deeply in the soil? Why give the Protector of the League against your life to the

worms, and suffer that she-dragon Montpensier—the quick soldier De Mayenne—and the haughty Count De Brissac to career at large—to escape from your Majesty's palace, that they may travel over the land, breathing a noxious vapour which will, in the end, suffocate you!"

"What! add fresh horrors to the work of death?" cried the distracted Prince.

"No, prevent them!" rejoined De Rosny, stretching forth his arm; "imprison those who will make the land a pestilential region of death. What say you, Baron De Nevailles?"

"It would be only an act of prudence to order into confinement the chief Leaguers," replied De Nevailles, addressing his Majesty.

The advice was taken—but it was too late; the Leaguers had escaped from the palace, leaving the dead body of the peasant Louis Le Lupin, who died in the service of his illustrious friend; and who was interred in the cemetery of the Capuchins in the King's garden.

When Montpensier quitted the Chateau de Blois, she knew no other object than instant revenge, but the friends of her brother, and the Deputies, were panic struck at the fate which had overtaken their leader; in vain did the haughty and violent Duchess attempt to rally their courage: they shrunk away from the struggle, and fled from Blois, as though they dreaded, in their own persons, a similar catastrophe to that of the Protector. Thus deserted and exposed to the order for their arrest, which Valois had issued, and of which timely information was conveyed to them by their friends in the palace, Montpensier, with the Duke de Mayenne, and his friends, escaped quickly to Paris, resolved to make that city the *point d'appui* of a power which should speedily overturn their cruel enemy.

The following day, which was to witness the second meeting of the States, saw only a deserted city; all had fled to their homes, or to a place of refuge, save the gentlemen attached to the party of the King; and many of these were undetermined whether to stay or quit the side of a monarch who had acted so outrageously.

Valois, being left to the bias of his own judgment, saw a prospect of ultimate safety only by a union with the Huguenots; and he accordingly proposed to them more advantageous articles of alliance, than had been offered by the Queen-mother. During the negotiation, De Rosny

urged the King of Navarre, still lying *perdu* at the chateau, and enjoying the sweet delight of stolen interviews with Gabrielle, that he should throw off his disguise, and encourage Valois by his presence; but in this matter the hero of Coutras was more cautious than even his subtle counsellor; he was indeed afraid of making himself known until he felt certain that the Queen-mother would not take advantage of his unprotected person; he dreaded lest she should arouse herself from her bed of sickness, and bind him once more in her cruel chains of thraldom.

But when the Huguenot forces under the Duke de la Tremouille and the Sieur de Vivans, arrived at the gates of Blois, Navarre threw off his disguise, put on his military harness, and went out to join his brave army. Valois visited the encampment of the Huguenots the day after their arrival, and in the tent of the Bourbon signed the articles of alliance which De Rosny and his coadjutors had been struggling so hardly to bring about.

Meanwhile, the flames of civil discord were blazing in every province of the kingdom; the leaguer buckled on his armour to encounter the adherent of royalty, and the heretic,—now joined, as the Catholics declared, in an unholy and unnatural union. Paris was entirely devoted to the Leaguers; and the Duke de Mayenne declared Lieutenant-General of the Forces of Catholic France; while under his control reigned the illustrious Council of Sixteen.

To regain the capital, and crush the faction which occupied its defences, the two monarchs resolved to march with their forces, and lay siege to the city; and although the winter had commenced, they resolved that the season's difference should not impede their labours till Paris was their own.

It was a strange, though a noble, sight for the citizens of Blois, to witness the junction of Huguenots and Catholics; to behold Marshal De Biron, who had taken a farewell of the dying Queen, and harnessed himself for the struggle, now leading to the field the soldiers who had closed in mortal combat at Coutras.

For the Baron de Nevailles, however, a far different office was assigned: he did not join the armies, nor was he present at the siege of Paris—a work of toil and trouble, as the chief labour of the besiegers lay in a continual

endeavour to stop supplies from entering the city to the relief of the famishing inhabitants.

But we are anticipating the progress of our narrative; and must return to Blois, to the chamber of the dying Queen, beside whose couch stood Madame D'Usez and the Baron de Nevailles. After a colloquy of trifling import to our readers, Catherine, in a feeble voice, said—

"I have sent for you, Baron, that you may convey to my daughter, the Queen of Navarre, my forgiveness of her desertion;—it is not meet that I should die estranged from my own family, while France looks so coldly on us;—and say, that this letter, which the cordelier has written at my dictation, will ease her of all her anxiety;—and give her this advice—to employ Roquelaure only in affairs where kindness, as the world names it, may be expected—he is a mere foolish creature, and could never have wrought upon me to relax in her favour, had not a strong necessity existed, or, as it now happens, the approach of a visiter, who comes but once in our life—I feel already the cold finger of the angel of death."

D'Usez whispered to the Baron that Roquelaure had administered to her the last rites of the Church.

"I have been irregular in my actions," said Catherine, "yet I have faith in forgiveness, forasmuch as my whole life has been consecrated to the extinguishing of heresy and preserving my subjects from destroying each other like savages."

"I do assure your Majesty," said the Baron, "that a pure and holy faith reigns in the hearts of the Huguenots, and I conjure you by the Holy Being whom you have no fear to meet, and who has been kind to us, whom you have persecuted with severity, to think of the Reformed faith as the creed and worship of pious men."

"Who have burnt and laid waste the Catholic churches and lands—destroyed the founts of worship of their parent faith—and set themselves up as superior to the holiest authorities of Christianity?" This was uttered by the Queen in a quick tone, and with an energy quite unexpected.

De Nevailles replied, that both sects had been violent, and had mutual cause to accuse each other of sacrilege;—but Catherine, roused by the contradiction, exclaimed that the Huguenots worshipped nature instead of the power of the Author of nature—that they discarded all

spiritualities and warnings,—omens sent from above to warn a sinful race,—and divine tokens of assent for the encouragement of the devout;—that these holy influences were despised by the Calvinistic doctors, and nothing out of the ordinary routine of nature believed.

The conversation was interrupted by De Miron.

"Another fool!" murmured the Queen, as she heard the solemn step of the physician.

De Miron inquired of his patient how she had felt since his absence.

"Worse!" replied Catherine.

"Your Majesty ought to have felt better, from the state I left you in—what nourishment has your Majesty taken?"

"Wine," said the Queen.

"Wine!" ejaculated De Miron. "*Mon Dieu*, wine!" and grinding his teeth with rage, he turned to D'Usez, and inquired of her, who had advised her Majesty to take such poison.

"Father Roquelaure," said Catherine, to save Madame the perplexity of an answer.

"Holy apostles! Father Roquelaure! Wine in such a case," cried the enraged physician, forgetful that he was in a sick room:—"those cursed monks ever pretend to be doctors of medicine, and yet not one of them is fit to dress a bruise on an ass's hoof! St. Martin! Father Roquelaure is the greatest fool between this city and Paris! *Mon Dieu!*"

"So I said but just now to M. De Nevailles!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Then I will send for Father Roquelaure to come hither," rejoined the physician—and he gave orders to that effect.

"When the footsteps of the cordelier were heard at the door, De Miron stepped aside, and Roquelaure advancing to the foot of the couch, said:

"Your Majesty, I hope, feels much quieter, and more at peace, since the service I administered———"

But the monk was interrupted by an unintelligible exclamation which burst from the physician. The cordelier turned round, but seeing only Madame D'Usez in the direction of the sound, at once concluded that it proceeded from her, and resumed his former position. The Dutchess looked scornfully at the idea that she could be the parent

of such a noise—nor was she much appeased at meeting the eyes of De Nevailles, who guessed her thoughts.

"Your Majesty, I hope, feels calmer," continued Roquelaure, "such danger as you were in, never permits us to delay that holy prescription, which St. Chrysostom has commanded us to———"

"Holy apostles!" exclaimed De Miron bursting from his concealment, "St. Chrysostom! what have you done?"

"If it were not for these simple creatures which swarm in the palace, and heaven knows every where, my illness would be misery, and beyond endurance," murmured the Queen in a whisper to De Nevailles.

A word from the monk and the excited fancy of De Miron was cooled; he saw his mistake and begged forgiveness.

A few days after this interview, the Baron was ascending the steep causeway of D'Usson, although the kingdom was in a most distracted state—the Queen-mother dying—her son, and his new colleague at war, with a faction which held Paris, Rouen, and the chief cities of France under their sway—yet De Nevailles felt a happiness to which he had long been a stranger. He was the bearer of a sealed packet, which, he felt certain, would disclose the history of Emilie, to whom he was now returning a penitent lover, anxious to efface every trace of displeasure from her brow, and willing to undergo the strictest penance which his wandering fancy merited.

He was received by the Queen of Navaare in every way befitting a grateful princess, desirous of honouring the man who had done her service. To her lively acknowledgments, the Baron replied, that he was the messenger of both joy and sorrow; that he sincerely regretted that the reconciliation with her illustrious parent, would in all probability be quickly terminated by her departure from the sphere of her energies and her triumphs. Hereupon he presented the letter which Catherine had transmitted as a legacy to her daughter.

Although Margaret had no great reason to be pleased with the bearing of the Queen-mother's policy towards herself, yet she could not peruse the sentiments of affection which her Majesty expressed towards her, without being sensibly affected at the idea of her loss. But Catherine had not contented herself with bare words: in

the same enclosure with the letter, was a grant from Valois, confirming his sister in the possession of D'Usson during her life; to be held as an inadequate compensation for the loss of her father's bequest.

"We may thank you, Baron, for the golden fruit of this letter of her Majesty," exclaimed Margaret; "yet the possession of D'Usson is as nought compared with the remission of our oath of secrecy respecting the destiny of Mademoiselle."

"You do the Queen of France injustice," replied De Nevailles;—"it was her own act, springing from her own unsolicited impulse. But I pray your Majesty to remember, that D'Usson is to me the end of a weary pilgrimage—a shrine before which I must appear in a garb of penitence."

"I will use my intercession," rejoined the Queen of Navarre, smiling at the figurative language of De Nevailles, "that your penance be not beyond endurance."

To describe the meeting between Emilie and her diplomatic hero is fairly beyond our power; had we selected from the hints, memoranda, and reminiscences of the Baron, and arranged them in harmonious order, we might have presented the reader with a faint outline of the pleadings of Monseigneur; the gentle upbraidings, followed by the eloquent silence of a heart forgiving and forgetting; but the interviews of lovers are of more interest to themselves than their friends; and grow tiresome and extravagant to the ears of readers, whose hearts beat not in unison with their own.

But that portion of the conversation which related to the mystery of which Catherine had removed the seal, must not be forgotten. To the astonishment of the Baron he heard from her sweet lips, that Emilie claimed the Queen of Navarre as her parent; that she was the offspring of a secret marriage with the Count De Ligny, who had been killed in an encounter with a gentleman only a few months previous to the arrival of the King of Navarre at Paris, whither he had been invited by the Queen of France to receive the hand of her daughter. Catherine had only discovered the marriage on proposing to Margaret that she should accept the young Bourbon Prince of Bearn as a husband—an offer which the proud beauty rejected with contempt—but from which, through the im-

portunities of her mother, and Charles her brother, she could only escape by confessing her marriage with the Count. The politic Queen, and her no less crafty son, who had only seized the idea of the Princess's marriage as a means of bringing together the Huguenots within their power in a vast shoal, to be immolated at one stroke, were excessively disconcerted with the frustration of their scheme. Whether De Ligny met his death otherwise than by an unpremeditated rencontre, the Queen of Navarre could never learn; but his fate wore a suspicious aspect in her eyes, which the subsequent conduct and violent temper of her brother did not diminish. At any rate, the obstacle to her union with the King of Navarre, was violently and abruptly removed; and Catherine and her son were full of joy at the event.

Emilie had been brought up secretly by her father at a chateau in the environs of Paris, to which Margaret resorted as often as opportunity offered. But upon the death of the Count, his daughter was removed by the orders of Catherine, and placed under the care of an ancient lady who had been formerly attached to the court. In spite of the remonstrances which Margaret made to the Queen-mother, the next of kin to De Ligny entered upon possession of the estate, to the entire exclusion of his daughter. This was exactly what the Queen of France desired; to her daughter she only replied in a jeering tone—

"And so you would have the Church of Notre Dame exhibit the august spectacle of the marriage of the widow of Count De Ligny with the King of Navarre! No, no! Margaret—though you have a head only for new dances and dresses—yet I must think and act for the welfare of our family and the kingdom!"

The reluctant marriage we have already related—the dispensation of St. Bartholomew and its fearful records of blood, are known to our readers. Navarré was saved from slaughter through a fear of the ill-report which the house of Valois would have acquired even with the Catholic princes of Europe, by the slaughter of Margaret's consort.

When the policy of Catherine grew milder, and she no longer resorted to the cruel means of silencing her domestic foes, which had been found so congenial to the

temperament of Charles, the youthful Emilie was admitted to visit her parent at the Louvre; a freedom which paved the way for a constant residence there. This privilege, however, was obtained only by Margaret and her daughter binding themselves never to disclose the secret of Emilie's rank, unless with her Majesty's consent. Save Valois, the only individual acquainted with the marriage and its history, was Roquelaure, the Queen of Navarre's confessor.

But notwithstanding the caution observed by Margaret and her fair offspring, the Queen daily trembled lest the birth of Emilie should be discovered; and the event turned to a political account against herself.

To prevent this disaster, she insisted that Mademoiselle should take the veil; a cruelty which dislodged all traces of affection from the heart of the Queen of Navarre towards her mother, whom she now regarded with ill-concealed anger and aversion. Hence her reconcilement with Navarre—her abetting his escape—and her determination to forsake the court.

The subsequent events we have either fully detailed in the course of our history, or thrown sufficient light upon their progress to make the narrative intelligible.

"And how could one so gentle as yourself," exclaimed the enraptured De Nevailles, "dwell beneath the angry frowns of the mistress of the Louvre?"

"I scarcely know," replied Emilie, "but her Majesty carried her violent resolves under a mask of smoothness. Sometimes she relented, and laughingly called me a little Valois that ought never to have seen the light. And even when angry, she would speak calmly. Before I quitted the Louvre to travel to the convent at Avignon, she said to me: "You have no right to a place in this world, Mademoiselle Emilie, and must not complain of its inhabitants that you are treated unceremoniously. We who hold the privilege to exist here, have a career to run—a long uneven course with a distant goal. Our destinies, Mademoiselle, are as conflictive as the contest of charioteers outvying and shooting beyond each other in the race. You, Emilie, are a stranger, and on foot, and must run the risk of being trampled on as an unavoidable impediment thrown in our path."

"If her Majesty lives long enough to welcome us to

the court," exclaimed the Baron, pressing her hand to his lips; "you may say, that though a stranger and on foot, a wayward charioteer who contended for the race more from the free exercise of his energies than desire of reaching the goal, stopped in the midst of the struggle to pick up a precious gem which lay in his path; and in the possession of which, he deems himself the most fortunate of the competitors."

We must quit this interview, so interesting to the lovers, to describe the enthusiasm with which Monsieur Pomini received the letters patent from the hands of De Nevailles, creating him the Seigneur of L'Isle du Marais. As he surveyed the blazonry which the facile invention of Montjoie had created for the man of letters-patent, he cried out in a voice of childish delight———

"I am now an equal of the Marquis—my career is ended!"

"If you are indeed a gentleman, Monsieur L'Isle du Marais," said De Nevailles, "you will feel it has but just commenced. Montjoie has charged that field of azure with anticipated deeds, yet to be realized by your skill and conduct."

L'Isle du Marais bowed profoundly; but it was as much to honour the appellation which he heard for the first time applied to himself, as to show his acquiescence in the sentiment expressed by the Baron.

But in the midst of the happiness which reigned at D'Usson, the mournful intelligence arrived of the death of the Queen-mother. The mighty soul of Catherine De Medicis had forsaken its earthly tenement; and left that world, whose children she delighted to struggle with, where power and dominion were the prizes of the conqueror.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,
Our stern alarums chang'd to merry meetings,
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.

SHAKSPEARE.

WHILE Henry, the second of that name, and the consort of Catherine, was alive and in good health, it had been foretold to her Majesty that all her sons would become kings. To this prediction she did not at the time attach much credit; but when Francis the Second died, scarcely at an age of maturity—and his brother, Charles the Ninth, succeeded to the throne, she became apprehensive lest the prophecy should be realized in its direst form. Her fears pointed to the successive occupation of the crown of France by her offspring—although the prediction had been uttered in general terms, and did not specify the titles of her children's future greatness. The course which she pursued, although in accordance with the ordinary feelings of the human race, was scarcely worthy of so clear-sighted a Princess.

Stimulated into a belief of the prediction by the death of her eldest son, she strove to elude its import in respect to the younger princes of the house of Valois. She could not see, or rather would not see, that if she put faith in the prophecy, it were useless to contend against it; yet her conduct evinced a belief of the power of the prophecy, while all her endeavours were strained to prevent its accomplishment.

To this end, she succeeded in placing Henry on the elective throne of Poland, and D'Alençon was subsequently despatched to pay court to the Queen of England; hoping by these means that the letter of the prediction might be fulfilled without the dreadful alternative of seeing her sons succeed each other on the throne of their ancestors.

But Charles died—D'Alençon died—and the last of the house of Valois, whose life had been attempted previously at the porch of Notre Dame, now fell a sacrifice to the vengeance of the monks, through their rage at the murder of the Protector.

Valois had declared to the assembled army of Catholics

and Huguenots besieging Paris, that they should enter by a passage through its rebellious walls; but he was not aware that at the moment he was giving utterance to this vindictive speech, the Leaguers had sped an arrow at his heart.

Jaques Clement, the enthusiast, whose wild fancies were kept in incessant play by his brethren, was again let loose like a blood-hound, to track the steps of his royal prey. He left the besieged city with letters intrusted to him by a gentleman attached to Valois, who had been purposely deceived in the character of the enthusiast, through the adroitness of the Leaguers. With these credentials he gained access to the King of France at the camp at St. Cloud; and while the monarch was perusing the papers, he was mortally wounded by the treacherous monk, whose mangled body, dispersed to all the winds of heaven, could but ill atone to the officers of Valois for the loss they had sustained.

Ere he died, the King named Henry of Navarre as his successor, who also claimed the crown as the eldest of the princes of the blood, as the Bourbon branch were designated.

But the Catholic Lords would not recognise the heretic Navarre as their sovereign; and they prepared to leave the camp, and forsake the siege. To prevent this step, which would have been the ruin of his own forces as well as his long cherished hopes, he supplicated them to reconsider their decision, and to survey the position in which they themselves would be placed, if De Mayenne, who openly aspired to the crown, were triumphant, assisted as he had been by the money and ammunition of Spain.

To this remonstrance the nobles replied by an offer of their allegiance if the Prince would enter the pale of the Catholic church. Navarre rejoined, that such a proceeding was immediately impossible; and that so sudden a conversion would be deservedly held as faithless and deceptive; but if they would continue the siege, he would apply himself devoutly to study the tenets of their religion. This offer was accepted—it gave breathing time to the monarch—and he left his future conduct to chance or expediency, determined to be guided by his own friends in the matter of conversion.

As the spring advanced, the chance of capturing the city became more and more certain; a famine, dreadful in its

effects to the poorer classes, and distressing to the richer inhabitants, was the daily portion of the besieged. Yet De Mayenne had a stout heart and resolute troops, and the voices of the preachers grew louder as their bodies became weaker. Montpensier, who fed on revenge, was in the city, and encouraged the Leaguers to withstand the evils which assailed them. Nicholas Poulain, whose vocation was still kept secret, (a test of his wonderful ability,) after the death of his royal mistress, and subsequently of her son, continued to render the same good offices to Henri Quatre, which he had performed towards the house of Valois, by sending information to the camp of the movements of the besiegers.

The lieutenant, however, was obliged to exert himself in the service of the League, and to appear the most zealous of its partisans. One morning Bussi Le Clerc, the polite governor of the Bastille, summoned Nicholas to accompany him to the palace of the Parliament.

"I have received orders," said Le Clerc, "to invite the Presidents and the whole court to dine with me at the Bastille to-day—and you must assist me in marshalling the squadron, as our venerable friends may be predisposed to escape."

Upon the breaking up of the States at Blois, the members of the court of Parliament—a chamber of executive justice, totally dissimilar to what is understood in England by the word Parliament—returned to Paris, and continued their sittings in spite of the war of the League, and even of the siege of the city. But these worthies had offended De Mayenne, and were consequently doomed to suffer for their treason to the holy Union of the Catholics.

Le Clerc, accompanied by Poulain and several halberdiers, entered the chamber where the Parliament was sitting, and requested the members of the court to accompany him home to his palace. But the venerable President, De Harlai, reproached him for his rudeness in interrupting the court, and bade him wait till the sitting was concluded.

"Rude!" cried the enraged Le Clerc;—"if La Chapelle had done this office, you might have thought him rude—but I! by St. Genevieve! I will be rude."

The revenge which Bussi Le Clerc meditated for the attack on his courtesy, was certainly more refined than might have been expected from a citizen-leaguer. He forced the court to give up its sitting, and to follow his

directions implicitly under threats of an inconvenient chamber in the Bastille.

The populace were seemingly well disposed to taunt and reproach the venerable and learned corps, who marched through the streets in their chamber costume, headed by Le Clerc, and followed by Nicholas and a pair of halberdiers. But the governor of the Bastille designed a far different punishment than the pelting of a mob. Lincestre had chosen that morning to deliver a discourse to the citizens on the performance of the duties which the League expected of them; and to the crowded hall, where the preacher sat in his professor's chair of St. Bartholomew, Le Clerc led the bewildered court of Parliament, in order to give them, as he informed Nicholas, an appetite for their dinner.

Lincestre, who witnessed the entry of Le Clerc and his learned train, glad of the unexpected presence of his victims, signified to the governor that he should conduct his friends to a convenient spot beneath the chair.

The discourse embraced an eulogy upon the late Protector, and an anathema against his enemies, threatening such as were alive with the penalties of hell, and adjudging those dead, to be already there. He informed his congregation that Henry of Valois was at that moment in purgatory tied to a stake, and surrounded by a girdle of Jews and sorcerers instead of fagots, and whose bodies burnt like pitch.

"Let us keep him there!" thundered out the preacher; —"pray to the saints that he may not escape, lest the intercession and prayers of ignorant and misguided men effect his release. Pray! take oath that you will pray—and hold up your hands as a signal. Ah! my Lord President," continued he, looking fiercely at De Harlai, who was ashamed to be seen in such company, and exposed to such insults, "your eyes are cast on the floor, and your hands are by your side. Up with them!—higher, by the holy God of vengeance—higher still! that all the people may see them, my Lord President."

The poor President was forced to hold up his hands in concert with the excited congregation, maddened with the vehemence of the preacher.

He then animadverted on the principal personages of France, both friends and enemies to the League. Of the late Queen Catherine, he said, "She was once a good saint,

and I do not much care if you should have leisure to say an *Ave* or a *Pater* for her—this I leave to your own inclination." But he suddenly started, and cried out in a loud voice, that fell upon his audience like a blast of lightning—

"Swear again—I have another oath!"

"Swear that you will spend the last denier in your purse to prevent this holy city falling into the hands of the Atheist Navarre! Swear that you will defend the city to the last extremity."

The half-famished congregation, whose blood was already fevered with incipient disease, and now inflamed by the harangue of the preacher, shouted like madmen. He was elevated in his chair on the shoulders of the most robust of the congregation, and carried into the street, the insensate flock singing and dancing around their idol.

"Paris is Jerusalem!" shouted the wild dancers, "and its people are starving! but plenty will soon be with us—and the streets shall flow with milk and honey."

Onward drove the mad cabal surrounding their stern preacher, and increaseing each moment by the accession of men, women and children, as furious as themselves—for the disease was contagious. By houses where lay the bodies of those who had died of famine—over the corse of many a poor wretch who had breathed his last in the open causeway—passed this grotesque tumultuary procession; while its throned influential power sat like a demi-god, calm and unmoved by the whirl and hurrying eddies which bore him along.

Behind, in sad contrast to the exhilerated dancers, walked the gentlemen of the long robe, like a train of gloomy penitents.

It chanced that the Duke De Mayenne and his officers were crossing the city to inspect the opposite suburb of Montmartre, which had suffered from an attack of the besiegers, who were only repulsed with great difficulty.

When the crowd saw the Duke approaching, they set up a loud cheer for their resolute chief, and opened a passage for him to pass through their dense body. The enthusiasts who carried the preacher—without any signal from their haughty burthen, bore him close to the horse of the Catholic commander, who guessing at the humour of the populace, saluted his austere friend with the greatest respect.

De Mayenne was very far behind his illustrious kinsman, the late Protector, in personal appearance; on the contrary,

the defects of his person were proverbial. A short thick body, best concealed beneath his black armour, from which colour he acquired the epithet of the dark Mayenne; a rough shaggy beard, and an enormous hand, designated both by friends and foes, *un gigot*, were the characteristics which would have betrayed the lieutenant-general of the League, the chief of the Holy Union, and the aspirant to the sceptre of Valois, in any province of France.

The Duke stretched forth a hand to his sanctified friend —it seemed to grow larger, the nearer it approached the priest, who put his own into it;—a signal for the multitude to shout with a vehemence which shook the very houses.

Poulain, who was bringing up the rear of the gentlemen of the long robe, heard a whispering among them; and being anxious to ascertain the subject of the colloquy, for he apprehended that one or more of the younger members intended to escape, an event which would have brought him into trouble with his courteous principal, the governor of the Bastille, approached as near as he could without betraying his suspicion of their intent.

"Ah! Monsieur De Thou!" said one of the gentlemen, "see how the rough Leaguer courts the monk; Father Lincestre is a happy man in his glory."

"Happy;—yes!" exclaimed the one spoken to, a grave-looking president, whose features did not in the least relax as he uttered his joke, "I had no faith in him before—but I plainly perceive he is a greater man than Moses—he has only to stretch forth his hand, and he gets into the land of fatness immediately."

"Umph!" murmured Nicholas;—"do these gentlemen know where they are to dine to-day?"

"It was worse than folly for De Harlai to oblige us to assemble when the rabble of the city were so excited," rejoined the first speaker;—"I wish I were safe out of Paris—but I verily believe our president would hold his court in the midst of an earthquake."

"I can fancy him in such a case," replied De Thou, suffering a transient smile,—within the limits of decorum of a president,—to cross his features, "the ground sinking all around him—a gentleman's head disappearing just as he had asked leave of the president to bring up a cause from the inferior court—and De Harlai, calm and unmoved, replying, as he stretched out his neck to have a glance at the vanishing head,—Monsieur, your proceeding is irregular."

"Well!" muttered Poulain, "these gentry of the robe are in some measure like myself—they look on danger coolly—and have a sly moment for a joke! I should like to be a President of Parliament if the seasons were quieter. A man's ruin or his advancement may be spoken of without offence."

"How unlucky," continued the lieutenant, aloud, "this rencontre!"

"And why?" asked De Thou, surveying the vacant face of Nicholas.

"Because, Monseigneur," replied the latter, without moving a muscle, "the drum has, ere this time, beat the dinner-hour—the chambers at the Bastille are opening a wide mouth for their expected guests—and my poor comrades, Jean and François, whom Monsieur Bussi ordered to be in waiting for his return—must be fatigued to death with their iron load, which the rascal Jean calls steel-sausages *à la Bussi!*"

"Unfeeling wretch!" exclaimed De Thou.

"It is very true," said Nicholas, moving back to his former station, beside the halberdiers;—"the very words I might have used if this same gentleman had told me with his gravity, that my land belonged to another."

"My good comrade, Nicholas," cried Le Clerc, pushing up to the lieutenant, "we are hemmed in on every side! Have a quick eye, while my fellows open a passage through the crowd."

Bussi Le Clerc thereupon shouted to the people to make way for Messieurs the President and Members of the Parliament; and as the halberdiers seconded this appeal by lowering their weapons, the multitude opened an avenue for the train, and it passed onward, amid the groans and curses of the people heaped on the heads of the unfortunate guests of the governor.

But evils never come alone. Le Clerc and his goodly company were very soon impeded in their progress by a crowd assembled round a church door. A troop of monks, preceded by others bearing wax-tapers, were carrying a figure of wax moulded into the effigies of the murdered Henry of Valois. These entered the church, just as Le Clerc approached the spot; and a little fat monk trailing an arquebuse was about to follow—but happening to catch a glimpse of the approaching procession, he stopped short, and the governor recognised the little Feuillant, Father

Bernard. The sight of the prisoners in their robes affected the monk almost to ecstacy, and he shouted out, while pointing to the wax-figure———

"*Au diable! Au diable! Au diable!* Behold your master! See his foul body in purgatory! Lead them into the Church! *alarme! alarme!* Ah! Ah!"

Le Clerc obeyed the summons. The scene within the church was in keeping with the mad priest-ridden spirit of the Parisians; we would fain pass over the frightful disgusting spectacle. Briefly:—the wax figure was brought to the altar—a large spit run through it lengthwise—and in this fashion, it was suspended above the many-lighted tapers on the altar, which soon caused the wax to melt. When it began to dissolve away, Father Bernard cried—

"Aha! See! By this token Henry, the atheist, is roasting in purgatory! 'Tis not enough! Make him confess, good people!"

And the corps of monks giving way to allow the multitude to approach, they began pricking and piercing the figure—the women with bodkins—and the men with lance-heads, pikes, and with the points of their swords. *Le diable Boiteux*, at every thrust, shouting out a terrific cry, which echoed through the vaulted aisles of the church.

From this scene, which was much too coarse for his taste, Le Clerc retreated with his prisoners; but when they emerged into the street, M. De Thou was missing. The governor was in a fury—the church door was immediately shut, and an active search commenced, but Monseigneur could not be found. Bussi could not help suspecting Poulain, against whom there had been gradually gathering a storm in the breasts of the Council of Sixteen, occasioned by the disclosure of many important proceedings of the League, which must have been divulged to the enemy by one intimately in their confidence, if not a member of their own Council. Henry of Navarre had, in fact, acted on the secret intelligence transmitted to him, with much less circumspection than characterized the proceedings of her late Majesty; and, in consequence, the suspicions of the Sixteen were roused to the utmost.

This being the case, a rigid but secret examination of their own members followed—but none were convicted—and at length suspicion rested on their active servant, Nicholas Poulain.

The escape of De Thou while under the joint care of

the lieutenant, determined Bussi to place him under the same *surveillance* as the prisoner who had fled. Nicholas remonstrated calmly, but the governor declared that suspicion would attach to himself if he did not confine him till an inquiry had been instituted by the Council. Faith in his fidelity being at so low an ebb, Poulain saw at one glance that his game was over—but there was now need of all his imperturbability, as he found himself suddenly within the toils of the municipal inquisition.

Affecting readiness to obey the order of the governor, he walked behind the vanguard of the halberdiers quietly till he was near the end of the *Rue St. Antoine*, and Le Clerc not wishing to display to the passengers the most confidential officer of the Council under arrest, had not taken the precaution, as he ought to have done, of placing the prisoner between two of the guard. This was just as Nicholas desired;—it was indeed his forlorn-hope; and it served him at need. He watched the opportunity, and rushed off from the solemn train, as they walked leisurely down the middle of the street. The lanes behind the *Rue St. Antoine* were familiar in all their turnings to his practised eye; through these he ran with the speed of a man flying for life, the inhabitants calling after him to know whom he was giving chase to—as they had seen no one in advance. Every one knew Poulain exceedingly well, and taking advantage of this circumstance, he cried out in his hurrying course, that the President De Thou had escaped from his hands on the way to the Bastille, and had fled down the back streets. Many of the Leaguers joined in the search, as De Thou was an object of their hatred; and the streets were covered with the voluntary *poursuivants*. The appearance of the halberdiers in the distance confirmed the relation of the lieutenant, who ran the fastest of any, and outstripped his coadjutors, who stopped in the streets, having no particular goal in view, and expecting that the President might suddenly appear, perhaps in the contrary direction to the flight of Nicholas.

As he approached the *Porte St. Antoine*, he beheld the officer on guard at the gate.

"I am safe," said the lieutenant to himself, "if they give me another half-minute."

"*Bon jour*, Monsieur Poulain!" said the officer, "what news? Have the heretics made another attack on Montmartre?"

"No!" cried Nicholas; "but De Thou has escaped! I must pass the gate to request the Chevalier to send his patroles through the suburbs!"

The Chevalier to whom Poulain alluded, was D'Aumale, who had the command of the soldiers of the League guarding the embankments and batteries raised for the protection of the suburb St. Antoine.

The gate closed upon the retreat of the breathless lieutenant, who with some little difficulty, escaped across the fields beyond the embankments, and was taken prisoner by a picquet of Huguenots, and carried, in obedience to his earnest request, backed by a purse of gold, to the head-quarters of Henri Quatre, by whom he was received with the greatest kindness.

The President De Thou had escaped without the assistance of Poulain, between whom and Monseigneur, the feeling was the reverse of friendly; a client who had seen him in the church contrived to dislodge him from the company of his colleagues, and stripping the robes from his back, he reached the outside of the edifice in safety, and sought shelter in the house of a friend, wherein he remained concealed.

But the siege was drawing to a close. The Prince of Parma, who had assembled a large army in the Low Countries to assist the league, died suddenly; and his officers refused to march into France, as the Hollanders were much disaffected with the Spanish sway, and the Prince, whose military talents had awed them into subjection, being removed from the scene, it was conjectured that the Spanish forces would have work enough in their own governments without seeking employment for their arms in France.

Meanwhile, the horrors of the famine increased in the city. And Henry of Navarre, who was earnestly bent on the capture of the place, no longer needing the spur of De Rosny or De Nevailles, so effectually cut off the supplies, that the Parisians were now deprived of the occasional aid of rations which came at night in boats from the towns on the Seine both above and below the city.

The King's party had been equally successful in other provinces of the kingdom, and prevented the Leaguers from hastening to the assistance of their leader, whose principal reliance having been placed on the co-operation of the Prince of Parma, he had suffered himself to be shut

up, believing that the city would soon be relieved by the arrival of the Spaniards. This hope proved fallacious; and no aid arriving from the south or the western provinces, he was reduced, by the want of food, to the alternative of capitulating or cutting a passage through the enemy, and leaving the city to its fate. But as the latter course would have deprived his good friends of making advantageous terms with the King, at the same time that it would have ensured their subjection through the absence of the garrison, he adopted the latter policy.

He had scarcely made up his mind to this course, when a judicious and well-planned attack on every side put all the suburbs in possession of the chivalric Bourbon Prince; and De Mayenne delaying no longer, sent a message to the enemy's camp that very evening. A conference ensued, and the terms of the capitulation were agreed on; they were extremely favourable to the Leaguers; but Henry ry declared that as he one day hoped to see every Frenchman acknowledge him as monarch, he would endeavour to gain the good-will of his present enemies by moderation and clemency.

To save the honour of the Duke de Mayenne, he was allowed to march out of the city with his garrison, ere the articles were signed; leaving the Count de Brissac, governor, to capitulate, and affix his name to the conditions. The Count, being very much in debt, had stipulated for the payment of four hundred thousand crowns to himself to pay off the claims of creditors, and to put his affairs in order. This was acceded to—the signatures were affixed to the capitulation paper—and the two gates of the *Porte St. Honoré* and the *Porte St. Denis*, put in possession of the royalists.

Ere day-break various detachments had marched into Paris to make all sure; and when the sun shone out with the splendour of mid-day, the head of the house of Bourbon, harnessed in the armour which had withstood the heavy blows of his enemies at Coutras, and surrounded by his gallant soldiers, Catholic and Huguenot, entered the city, and rode direct to the palace of the Louvre. Since he had quitted its spacious halls, a noble dynasty had been swept to the dust; and despite the joy which beamed on the features of his brave comrades, and the completion of his own high destiny, his face was charged with an expression of regret and sorrow for which his

officers could not account. But memory reverted to his parting with D'Alençon, and the untoward fate of that eccentric Prince; every saloon and well-remembered hall was associated with objects of pleasure or of pleasing regret; and it was not till after many days' residence at a palace which he could scarcely bring his mind to believe to be his own, that he regained his wonted equanimity, and had leisure to survey the pinnacle of power to which he had attained.

The power of the League was extinguished by the surrender of the capital to the sway of the gallant monarch; Rouen, and other cities, capitulated in a similar manner; —that is to say, Henry did not object to pay various sums of money to the nobles of the League, who had almost ruined themselves in its cause; by which peaceful means he shortened the duration of the contest, and restored internal peace to the kingdom of France.

This fine country having passed through its ordeal of civil wars, became firmly united under the rule of the house of Bourbon. The nobles, being no longer under the necessity of living beneath walls of iron, threw aside their cumbersome armour for the light garb of peace;—exchanging the creaking of rusty hinges and jointed vambraces for the rustling of silk and velvet: and the half barbarous gentleman of the sixteenth century became a worshipper of the polite theories of the Count De Quelus, who, in matters of personal economy, was far beyond his age.

The merchant, the agriculturist, and the poorer classes of the kingdom, felt the change from war to peace still more beneficially; and their progressive and unwearied labours, under the care of a wise Prince, ensured a rapid prosperity to themselves and their country.

An honest country gentleman, whose house stood on the apex of a hill commanding a panoramic view of varied beauty, wishing to have the whole scene transferred to canvass, engaged a landscape painter to perform the task, and while incidentally describing the nature and extent of the prospect, said—" you must first draw your circle!" Neither the painter nor ourselves, to whom the anecdote was related, could understand otherwise, than that the artist was to describe a circle on his canvass, placing the hill and superincumbent mansion in the centre;—the point of

view which greeted the Squire every morning, and which he no doubt expected to see faithfully illustrated on the painter's canvass.

We hope that we have described our own "circle" to the satisfaction of our reader;—not, indeed, by presenting to him the whole arena at one view, but by carrying him with us around the course, from the Louvre, our starting post, back to the same ancient palace, our goal.

But being apprehensive, that some very inquisitive friends may attempt to pick a quarrel with us for letting fall the curtain upon the *dramatis personæ*, as they stand grouped around the heroic Henry—without even a hint of their future welfare or unhappiness, we will introduce the characters severally as they retire from the stage, quite unconscious of being made the object of farther speculation. The ladies shall have the preference.

Catherine—but we forget, alas! that she was no more; yet Margaret still lived and flourished, not as Queen of France, for she and Henry were as magnetic poles of the same bearing—flying apart whenever accidentally brought into contact. She was divorced with the consent of his Holiness, and lived sometimes at D'Usson, and sometimes at her magnificent hotel in Paris, the patroness of literature, especially of literary ecclesiastics and monks—and the foundress of more than one convent. She died the last scion of the house of Valois!

The Dutchess of Montpensier, perceiving the cause of the League was for ever lost, buried her violent political tendencies, and employed herself in the education of her brother's children. The Princess of Condé, related through her late husband to the house of Bourbon, remained a favourite at the Louvre,—but Henry was not rich enough, or rather disbursed his money in ways better calculated to improve the impoverished country, than placing it at the command of the lady of the revels.

With the death of her royal mistress vanished the political influence of the Dutchess D'Usez, but her wit and beauty remained to enliven the circle in which she had shone so brilliantly. The Countess Candales, who had bestowed herself and fortunes on the handsome D'Espernon, continued by her gentle coquetry to excite uneasiness in the mind of her husband, but it is not recorded that she ever again condescended to watch the motions of princes in their nocturnal promenades.

But the reader may be inquiring after Gabrielle! If he have ever seen the name of the Dutchess De Beaufort in the annals of the reign of Henri Quatre, he will have read the title bestowed on her by her royal lover preparatory to honours still more illustrious,—delayed, in the first instance, by the intrigues of the monarch's councillors, and finally anticipated by—we must write it, though we would fain let flourish in the imagination of our reader, so fair a flower—by death.

Emilie! We said but just now that Margaret died the last of the house of Valois—yet Emilie survived her mother—worthy of the stock from whence she sprang, though unhonoured, unrecorded by public history through the pride and policy of the Queen-mother—dispossessed also of her father's seigniory through the impediments which hindered the establishment of her parentage, and which attempting to remove, would, in case of failure, have affixed a stain on her surviving parent. A cruel fate! but for which Margaret made amends out of the lands appropriated to her Majesty on her divorce from France and Navarre.

Whether Lisette deserve mention we know not, but we can find scarcely any trace of her future history, save that she continued in the family of the Baroness De Nevailles. We did expect,—judging from what we heard of the girl, and the clever lacquey, Antoine, that by searching the registers and records open to our inspection,—to find evidence of their marriage, being so well disposed toward each other. Our inquiry was fruitless, and we can only hope that such a union did occur. But to the other sex!

D'Espernon lived to an extreme old age, and mindful of the favour enjoyed at court in his youth and manhood, asserted a right to drive into the inner court of the Louvre, deemed the privilege only of royalty. But the favourite of Valois carried his point against Louis De Bourbon.

The Marshal De Biron was created a Duke for his services by Henry; but though repaid so amply by the gratitude and generosity of the monarch, he could not forget the dynasty which flourished in his youth. Candales lost her attractions; and the shades of Catherine and Valois haunted his memory, and made him, at times, a jealous and factious subject of the Bourbon monarch. We must not omit to record, that he composed a Greek elegy on the death of his late sovereign.

De Rosny became De Sully with a ducal title; and no man ever earned his honours and his wealth more deservingly. The finances of the kingdom, as might be expected, were in a wretched condition when Henri Quatre ascended the throne; but the prudence, the tact, and we might say, the furious and determined warfare, which Sully maintained against the peculant collectors and intendants of taxes and imposts, rendered his sovereign a service above all price—and himself worthy the imitation of future ministers.

De Grammont held a rank of importance in the French armies; but was of little service as an adviser of his liege. The Marquis De Cœuvres was honoured with the insignia of the three orders of the King, as a recompense for the loss of D'Usson; the governorship of a military post was offered him, but his age caused him to decline the command. The Viscount De Turenne, as we have already intimated, married the sister and heiress of the Duke De Bouillon, which title and sovereign principality became his own, and enabled him, when it suited his pride, to retire to the strong town of Sedan, and set his sovereign at defiance.

The Count De Quelus continued a model of graceful carriage, and elegance of costume, till, unfortunately, he fell in a duel. His monument was honoured by an epitaph, a portion of which appears at the head of one of the chapters in the present volume. Monsieur De Villeroi was too well instructed in affairs of state to be neglected by the new dynasty; he remained in office till he was too old to display courage in the chace, and sought amusement in the composition of memoirs, illustrative of his own era,—in which he laboured hard to prove his fidelity to Valois.

The Duke De Mayenne tendered his allegiance to Henry, and disbanded his forces—striving to forget, in the arts of peace, his ambitious and fruitless designs, which, indeed, at one time (so deep was the feeling against Valois for the assassination of Guise,) were deemed not impracticable. D'Aumale became a pupil of the Count De Quelus: the once formidable Lincestre sank into obscurity—his *rôle* was played: the treacherous Bussi Le Clerc, for whose defection we were grieved, as the man was not destitute of generous qualities, fled to Brussels in apprehension of danger, and continued to reside there till the

day of his death; and disdained not, far away from the scene of his glory, to resort to his old profession of *maître d'armes*.

Nicholas Poulain was made chief officer of the police; subsequently deputy-governor of the Bastille; and was, besides, often employed in the delicate task of watching the proceedings of foreign envoys, in which he acquitted himself to perfection.

Roquelaure, as his Holiness predicted, never reached an elevated station in the monastic or ecclesiastic hierarchy; but he retained the office of confessor to the Queen of Navarre, and it is strongly surmised that her Majesty's hotel had more attraction in his eyes than the richest abbey, or post of secretary to cardinal or pope.

As an appurtenance of royalty, Chicot became the servant of the fourth Henry, but like De Biron, his sympathies were retrospective; the new dynasty, in his imagination, wore a forlorn, cheerless aspect; his heart was with the lost Valois, and despite the friendship of the Baron De Nevailles, he drooped inwardly. It was remarked that he was fond of visiting the residence of the Queen of Navarre, for which no other cause could be assigned than her relationship to his late master. Whether he would have recovered from this melancholy we cannot say, as he was cut off prematurely by violence, and by a knightly hand; a rare honour mayhap, to one of his class, and purchased cheaply with the loss of life. He died rich, and left De Nevailles his heir.

Jean François Pomini, Sieur L'Isle du Marais, lived to a good old age, and was succeeded by his son of the same name. The family continued to flourish till the waters of the Revolution, more destructive than the rapid Rhone, overflooded the seigniory and its possessors; whether since the subsidence of the moral deluge, the old landmarks remain unimpaired, or whether the Pominis of L'Isle du Marais were merged in the class from whence they sprang, it is impossible for us to say, as *la jeune France* is a region as yet unknown to us.

Ezzelin and his friend Schwartz recrossed the Rhine, much richer than at their entry into the scene of warfare and plunder; indeed, the return of Turenne's regiment, after the siege of Paris, at which it was present, to Germany, caused a strong sensation among the needy adventurers of that nation, who deeply regretted the termina-

tion of hostilities which deprived them of all chance of rivalling the good fortune of the Viscount's Ritters.

The same uncertainty which hangs over the fortunes of Lisette, shrouds the career of Antoine; we know only that he continued in the service of his master.

The after-career of the Baron himself can be traced with much certainty and minuteness. From letters in his own hand, and from others written by friends of the Baron, we learn that his domestic happiness was complete: that his sovereign heaped honours on his favourite councillor; and that with the riches accruing from resources already hinted at, the Chateau de Nevailles became the nucleus of a hamlet of considerable extent. But how sped the public career of our ardent diplomatist? If the truth must be told,—with less glory than he coveted—and the cause may be traced to his eccentricity of conduct and grotesque humour. His ambition desired the post of secretary of state, that he might exercise a permanent influence in guiding the destinies of his country, and if his Majesty's pleasure had been the only obstacle to this step, it would have been readily yielded to the favourite's desire; but the king's other advisers were unanimous against his elevation; Henry, whose cabinet was composed of members of both religions, and who perceived that the embers of civil strife were not completely extinguished, was unwilling to embroil himself with his ministers; and in consequence contented himself, for the present, by bestowing on the Baron the insignia of the three orders of his Majesty, a captaincy in the royal guard, and a government in Navarre. But although the eccentricity and humour of De Nevailles had made him an object of dread to the cabinet, yet on many occasions his services were indispensable. When a difficulty occurred with a foreign court, through the obstinacy or caprice of its sovereign or minister, or as it happened, the untoward influence of a royal mistress, the advisers of his most Christian Majesty united in crying, "We must send De Nevailles." His missions were, indeed, eminently successful; though after a severe scrutiny of the temperament and conduct of the Baron, we are forced to sympathize with the prudential fears of Henry's council.

The *bonhommie*, good sense, and tact of the fourth Henry, speedily rendered him a popular monarch; he was endowed with a rare faculty—that of listening to, and

adopting the policy of his wisest councillors. This conduct in a great degree contributed to the successes which won him the title of Henry the Great. And, although on a narrow view, it might be urged that the triumphs, both civil and warlike, for which he was famed, were due to his councillors, it must be borne in mind, that for a prince of active faculties, clear perception, enthusiastic temperament, and military skill of the highest character, to submit in every instance to the advice and remonstrances of abler heads, was in itself a proof of genius; an evidence of humility of heart, and of a self-conviction, that the will of a good monarch must bend to the wisdom of faithful advisers.

The conversion of Henry to the Catholic faith, and his consequent submission to the discipline of the church of Rome, may appear to the student of history to need extenuation or apology. But we do not hold this most important step to have been a criminal dereliction of religious duty; and we have never attempted to elevate the *man* for the sake of creating a hero of romance. We trust that the aim of literature or of moral and political science is better supported by depicting and contrasting the good and evil which appertain to historic personages, than by concealing weaknesses, and heightening virtuous characteristics to the standard of ideal or romantic perfection.

Henry had no alternative but to seek refuge within the pale of the olden faith, or resign the crown. This is the plain unvarnished truth:—Catholic France, in the sixteenth century, refused to obey a Calvinistic monarch. And what would have been the result if Henry, through conscientious scruples, had resigned his birthright, (retain it he could not as a Huguenot,) and retired to the little kingdom of Navarre, rather than adopt the religious discipline of the majority of his subjects? The race of Valois was extinguished. France would have been annexed to Spain under the sway of the Duke De Mayenne, as viceroy; or if Philip had foregone his claim by marriage with a daughter of France, the brother of the late Protector might have been a nominal king. In any wise, Spanish gold and Spanish arms would have converted the kingdom into a province of Spain, without power, however, of crushing the Huguenots in their strong holds.

Hence would have resulted a most destructive intestine war, without prospect of termination.

This threatened disaster was obviated by the conversion of Navarre. The Catholic nobles who had kept aloof, became submissive and loyal subjects; Spain and her allies withdrew their pretensions; and Henry reigned over a united kingdom.

That he did not, however, desert the Huguenots, we have sufficient proof, not only in his edicts of religious toleration, but in the creed of his ministers and the governors of provinces, many of whom were of the reformed faith;—the Duke De Sully among the most illustrious.

The entry of the Bourbon Prince into Paris, marks the boundaries of two important epochs in modern history. It consolidated the power of the monarchy, strengthened the kingdom by the acquisition of Navarre, with its mighty barrier of mountains. The stream of French history flowed on in a regular uninterrupted channel; civilization, with its literary fruits, followed in the train of domestic peace; while the warlike energies of the nation were directed against foreign enemies and aggressors.

To the imagination, the entry of Navarre into his capital, presents a picture causing mingled pleasure and regret. The long array of chivalry displays the last pageant of romance; the martial trophies of the feudal era, the burnished harness of Milan proof, and with these, the valour and courtesy of the olden time, are about to fade away, and live only in the memory of poets and chroniclers.

We see the apotheosis of chivalry; we behold the gallant train of soldiers, whose names have been familiar in Europe from the era of Charlemagne, crowding the streets of Paris, as of yore, when a royal tournament or congress of arms, had assembled the flower of the nation. The houses are graced with the presence of the fair dames who "rain influence and judge the prize;" the air is rent with the cries of delighted subjects; the hero of Coutras is before the Louvre; and chivalry is extinct with the chivalric career of her last hero.

THE END.